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Communicative Elements of Fluid Collective Organizing

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Communicative Elements of Fluid Collective Organizing

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2019

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help of many individuals. First, I would like to specifically thank the participants of this study who made time in their busy schedules to help me with this project. I would also like to extend a broader thank you to the entire BMX and dirt jump community. Countless individuals have picked up shovels, stacked jumps, packed landers, hauled buckets of water, and pushed brooms in support of public dirt jumps. Their voluntary contributions helped to make this dissertation a reality.

There are also several friends and riding buddies whose friendship helped to balance the stresses of the PhD program. Working with Brett Robertson on research projects was a breeze, but I also valued our coffee breaks during the workday. Whether it was summer mountain bike adventures across the country, or simply short after school dirt jump sessions—my time spent with Doug Sassaman, Chris DeHaro, Richie Getter, Justin Broussard, Chayce Lanphear, Matt Land, Rowdy, T. T. Acoma, and all the builders and riders of Freeride 512, truly enriched my time in graduate school.

Of course, the mentorship and guidance of my advisor Dr. Jeff Treem was foundational. I never would have thought that our brief first encounter at a 2013 NCA reception would turn into a 5 year relationship. Throughout this time, Jeff's mentorship pushed me to think in more advanced ways about this work. Not all advisor/advisee relationships are created equal, and I am very fortunate to have stumbled into the best mentor/mentee combination possible. Several other individuals at the University of Texas have been influential to my academic development. I am grateful to Dr. Keri Stephens for offering a well-structured graduate class that included data collection as part of the course,

and for including me in a grant funded research project. Both the class and the research project led to publications. Dr. Keri Stephens and Dr. Josh Barbour were also instrumental during my job market semester. Whether proofreading cover letters, writing letters of recommendation, or helping me to strategize—Keri and Josh's guidance was crucial for successfully navigating the hiring season. Special thanks to my committee—Dr. Josh Barbour, Dr. Sharon Jarvis, and Dr. Brad Love—for working with me throughout. Clemson University professors Dr. Darren Linvill, Dr. Joe Mazer, and Dr. Travers Scott also helped me transition from the MA to a PhD program. It is because of the advice and guidance of all of these individuals that I was able to ultimately achieve my goals.

Undertaking a time-intensive doctoral program over a thousand miles from home meant that I missed many family gatherings and did not phone in as often as I probably should have. Despite my absence around the home front, mom, dad, granny, and Reah were understanding and allowed me the space to pursue such rigorous studies. I would like to thank all of my family (and soon to be extended family of the Framptons) for supporting me through this process.

Lastly, I would like to thank my fiancée Jessica for sticking with me throughout *all* of graduate school. When the fickle nature of PhD program placements landed us at separate universities many miles apart, you signed on for much more than could be expected of anyone. PhD programs are tough. Relationships take work. Succeeding at both was made more difficult by the distance between us. I appreciate your support and patience with me throughout this journey.

Abstract

Communicative Elements of Fluid Collective Organizing

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

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Organizational communication research has traditionally focused on the organizing processes of firmly structured conventional organizations, such as workplaces, schools, and nonprofits. However, a growing line of research is beginning to investigate more fluid, ad-hoc, ephemeral, spontaneous, and loosely structured social collectives. This dissertation draws upon interview, observational, photographic, and social media data collected over a four-year time frame to investigate how a community of bicycle motocross (BMX) riders in the Southern United States communicate and organize to build and maintain public bicycle dirt jumps, despite lacking many of the elements commonly associated with formal organizing. The dissertation explores three key areas: (1) how communication gives rise to forms of authority in this fluid social collective, (2) how the materiality of the natural environment intersects with the group's organizing, and (3) how intermingling social, material, and performative practices negotiate the tensions inherent to this organizational setting. Findings of the first study reveal that specific communicative interactions in the form of repetitive stories and assertives scale up to form a paradoxical "authoritative text" (Kuhn, 2008) that upholds a group ethos of contribution, but fails to specify the nature of

how to carry out that contribution. The paradoxical nature of this authoritative text perpetuates conflict within the space. Study two conceptualizes environmental materiality as pure natural or (re)natural—depending upon the degree of alteration at human hands—and explains how a combination of these forms of nature contribute to the group's *organizationality*. Finally, study three develops a model showing how the tensions of organic/civic, inclusion/consensus, and contributing/loafing are negotiated through communicative practices to sustain a version of the space that is both material and vision flexible. Theoretical contributions of this dissertation include extending our understanding of how authoritative texts emerge outside of formal organizing, providing a stronger analytical focus on the material, and explicating the importance of the space of practice in the tensions inherent to fluid organizing. The final section provides suggestions for how organic community recreation sites might be supported through official organizations, without bureaucratic or institutional influence undermining the core characteristics of the community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It is 10am on a Saturday morning in Appleton [pseudonym]. A lone BMX biker begins to sweep the leaves off of a jump track within a public park. Soon other riders arrive and join his efforts by moving wheelbarrows of dirt to the construction site of a new jump. A few blocks away from the dirt jump park, a graffiti mural artist is plotting where her next artistic creation will fit on the concrete canvas of an abandoned condominium foundation. Some visitors to the outdoor gallery snap photos of the colorful murals, while other tourists try their hand at crudely spray painting letters and scribbles. The success of both the dirt jump park and the graffiti art gallery relies on the unpaid volunteer labor of multiple individuals. These individuals communicate to coordinate efforts and action—despite lacking any formalized organizational structures to direct activity.

The vignette presented above represents a typical day within a fluid volunteer collective. The first example is reconstructed from field notes recorded in the primary field site of this study. With a little searching, one can find numerous examples of unpaid volunteer collective activity similar to the scenes described above. For instance, the "Burnside" concrete skatepark in Portland, OR was financed and built solely by a loose grouping of passionate skaters (Hamm, 2010). While Burnside has survived for almost 30 years, a similar skatepark built underneath an Atlanta, GA interstate was recently demolished by the city due to the illegality of the construction (Haney, 2017). In 1989 after Hurricane Hugo washed a small boat ashore in Folly Beach, SC, residents turned the side of the unclaimed vessel into a public mural free for anyone to paint a message onto. For 28 years a loose grouping of volunteers maintained the art installation until 2017's Hurricane Irma carried the boat adrift (Kropf & Behr, 2017). It is not difficult to picture other collective outcomes, such as community gardens, hiking trails, community 'free boxes,' or

common areas, that exist without financial support or oversight from local governments and have few (or no) organizational elements.

These forms of organizing are curious for a few reasons. The term "organization" conjures up ideas of concrete things such as buildings, workplaces, people, uniforms, or more abstract arrangements and social categories such as boss, hierarchy, authority, employee, duties, roles, promotions, etc. The scenes of unpaid volunteer collective activity described above lack these elements, yet the collective outcomes of those groups more or less persist. These fluid collectives prompt me to ask "how?" How do these sites maintain their organization-ness without being organized? How do these sorts of spaces requiring countless hours of sporadic volunteer contributions continue to exist without possessing the commonly understood elements of organization? That is, the focus of this dissertation lies in unraveling how people communicate and organize to accomplish collective actions in these loosely structured collectives. The following research question is the overall guide for this dissertation:

How does communication in constitute fluid volunteer based collective actions?

I pose this question at a time when the activities of many spheres of life are seemingly becoming more fluid and dispersed—thanks in part largely to technological advances. The rise of "boundaryless careers" (Arthur, 1994) and "post-bureaucratic" organizing (Barker, 2014) denotes a shift from traditional employment in a single organization, to mobile careers unfolding across multiple organizations. Communication technology advances have even given rise to teleworking practices, meaning employees can complete work outside of organizational boundaries (Ellison, 2004). The ubiquity of these technologies can blur the boundaries between career and home life when individuals bring 'work' into home spaces (Gregg, 2013). Putnam and Mumby (2014) claim that the fluidity of organizational boundaries means "it is no longer easy to identify where an

organization begins and ends" (p. 11) and call for more scholarship to interrogate the issue. The fluid and mobile nature of work is especially prevalent within "gig economy" (Manyika et al., 2016), contingent, or distributed work arrangements. Relationships between employer and employee in the gig economy are often tenuous as many workers are classified as independent contractors or freelancers in order to complete short term assignments. Outside of employment, participation in community organizing, social movements, activism, and collective protest are becoming more distributed and ad-hoc within contemporary networked environments (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005). Globalization perspectives call for investigating the increasing speed with which the world is becoming more interconnected and networked (Castells, 2011; Stohl & Ganesh, 2014).

At the heart of all these changes is the idea that relating and communicating with others is not constrained by organizational boundaries, proximity, or temporality. The ever-increasing fluidity of our world demands interrogation of some key principles associated with organizing, such as authority, tension/disorder, communicative practice, nature, agency, and materiality. This dissertation seeks to increase our understanding of the fluidity of organizing.

There are also practical reasons motivating this inquiry. I have carried out part of this research amid the record-breaking U. S. government shutdown of late 2018 to early 2019. When governments shut down, many public goods go partially or completely with operational budgets. Public recreation areas, and National Parks in particular, have had to close or operate providing limited services. With few tax dollars and limited resources dedicated to the creation and maintenance of public recreation and leisure spaces, increasingly citizens are having to be proactive in maintaining or creating these spaces. If this trend continues, and ordinary citizens find themselves the caretakers or creators of

shared public goods, then it is worth understanding how communication can facilitate or hinder this process.

In some instances, local governments are invested in financially supporting public leisure spaces. However, city officials often view these recreational pursuits from an outsider position. As a result, many government entities construct—at the low end, prefabricated metal skateparks, and at the high end expansive (and expensive) concrete skateparks—in the hopes that this public good will satisfy the entirety of skateboarders, rollerbladers, scooter riders, and BMXers. There are undoubtedly many well-constructed and well-designed concrete skateparks across the United States. Other parks, however, may look acceptable from an outsider's vantage point, but to a skateboarder or BMXer well versed in the particulars of their sport, the features of the park are often not rideable[1]. Despite the best intentions, attempts at constructing action sports public leisure spaces without intimate knowledge of the practice and culture of those sports can often lead to subpar products that often go unused.

Furthermore, attempts to provide public leisure spaces for BMX riders over the past 30 years has centered on creating multi-use concrete parks, or BMX race tracks, and do not focus on dirt jumping. While the past decade has seen the growth of pump tracks and skills parks in a few cities in the United States (McClain, n. d.), the construction of dirt-based skills parks and pump tracks by individuals unfamiliar with the needs and wants of BMX dirt jumpers will face similar problems as the concrete skateparks that fail to generate user interest. When executed well[2], often with the help of corporate sponsorships or substantial

[1] For example, see Thrasher Skateboard Magazine's "Certified Piece of Suck: Bogus Skatepark Construction" article for photographs of poorly designed public recreation. http://www.thrashermagazine.com/articles/certified-piece-of-suck-hall-of-shame-2-2/

[2] For examples of well executed public dirt jumps see: Duthie Hill Mountain Bike Park, Issaquah, WA; Frisco Bike Park, Frisco, CO; Ruby Hill Bike Park, Denver, CO; The Railyard, Rogers, AR; Valmont Bike Park, Boulder, CO. All parks listed are free public goods.

public funds, public dirt jump locations *can* support a diversity of participants, including BMX, dirt jump, trials, and cross-country mountain bikers.

Previous studies have shown that extreme sports, such as BMX dirt jumping, can have positive physical and psychological effects for participants (Brymer & Oades, 2009; Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013; Willig, 2008). A systematic review of research on Public Open Spaces (POS)—leisure locations accessible to all people, such as parks squares and playgrounds—found that the presence of these types of public amenities is positively associated with increased levels of physical activity, particularly for adolescents (Van Hecke et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many states may lack the funds to build these spaces, which is where fluid volunteer collective organizing could be utilized. Findings from this research can help guide recreation departments seeking to construct similar types of recreation spaces—particularly if they are lacking the funds to fully construct the park.

While public recreation and leisure spaces provide benefits to the community, other forms of emergent and fluid volunteer collective activity can help respond during crisis. For example, when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, TX in Fall 2017, the tropical storm trapped over 50,000 people in flooded homes and neighborhoods. A flooding event of this magnitude overwhelmed official disaster responders—in both volume of calls for help and by rendering their facilities and vehicles inoperable. With conventional disaster responders stretched thin, ordinary citizens formed impromptu rescue groups to begin water rescues of other stranded citizens (Smith, Stephens, Robertson, Li, & Murthy, 2018). While these impromptu rescue groups are undoubtedly different from the types of fluid collectives that construct public leisure spaces, it is worth noting that these rescue groups also lacked many conventional organizational elements. In sum, a stronger academic focus on this type of collective activity could yield practical benefits.

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

I do not take a 'communication approach' to collective activity. Instead, I argue that accomplishing collective action *is* a communication phenomenon at its very core. To understand collective activity is to understand communication. Organizational communication is one such scholarly approach that could help to explain how ordinary citizens organize on an impromptu and organic basis to create and maintain these public goods. At a fundamental level, organizational communication scholars are concerned with how communication facilitates both the *process* of organizing (Weick, 1969), as well as how communication comes to constitute the very thing we know of *as* an organization. Whether studying organizing as a verb, or organization as a noun, or even degrees of "organizationality" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), the topic usually involves communication and cooperation among multiple individuals to achieve some collective goal. In this dissertation, I generate distinctively communicative understandings of how volunteers achieve collective outcomes in settings that lack formal organizational structure.

How might one study the organizing processes of these forms of collectives, if, as I argue, they lack defined meeting times, membership lists, boundaries, bosses, etc.? How would one even negotiate access to such a space, or be able to ensure times to observe will be thriving with communicative activity? In short, one cannot necessarily approach fluid organizing through a conventional lens. Approaching the field site with more conventional methods of survey instruments, or planning for set times of observation and participation would likely lead to frustration. From a methodological standpoint, studying this form of collective action requires an immersive adaptability to the scene—preferably over a long term. Further, the theoretical toolbox used to discuss the data needs to be flexible. In order to treat these forms of collective activity as communication phenomenon, one must not restrict theorizing to simply speech or text, or rely on generic hallmarks of organization.

Instead, theory should be sensitive to the role of humans, materials, technologies, performances, patterns, routines, and actions in constituting collective activity. Therefore, the following section introduces two theoretical frameworks capable of capturing the complexity of fluid organizing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Two theoretical perspectives are amenable to treating collective activity as communication: the Montréal school of communicative constitution of organizations (CCO; Cooren, 2006, 2010, 2012; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), and the practice theory perspective (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Leonardi, 2015). In the CCO approach, communication is not simply a variable of study within organizations; rather, organizations come into existence *through* communication. This approach considers many human and nonhuman elements as capable of communicating. The CCO approach urges the scholar to remain grounded within the communicative action of the data. Similar to the CCO approach, a practice perspective encourages researchers to examine the many consistent actions, performances, routines, and patterns that are utilized in accomplishing work. Practices can be analyzed at a microsocial level, or these microsocial actions can be viewed together as "constellations of established practices" (Lammers & Barbour, 2006, p. 364) in order to make claims about organizational phenomena. In short, a practice lens looks at *how* people work as an explanation for organizing processes.

A strength of both theoretical approaches is that they do not focus exclusively on a single realm of communication. For instance, each approach allows for theorizing discourse, action, and materiality as communicative. In the CCO approach, inanimate materials are theorized as having agency, or the capacity to "make a difference" (Cooren,

2006). Similarly, Leonardi (2015) describes practices as "materially bound" (p. 238) in that social practices often emerge alongside material things. The flexibility of each approach allows for truly capturing how communication, broadly theorized, leads to collective action.

There are multiple branches of scholarship within each perspective that attempt to explain collective activity—more than can be explained in this dissertation. Much of the early organizational communication research focused on traditional, formal, or established organizations such as corporations, businesses, factories, or other work settings. Although the organizational environment has shifted to more post-Fordist, post-bureaucratic, and flexible organizational forms (Barker, 2014), the field continues to focus a great deal of attention on paid employment organizations. Ashcraft (2007) even claimed, "we have largely privileged a form of cultural analysis that takes organization as a finite place where work gets done and culture as a reality emerging among those who work within the borders of that space" (p. 11). Some scholars observe that 'professional' or white-collar work is often considered the standard—perpetuating a "managerial bias" (Cheney, 2007; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). These types of organizations often have clear structures, hierarchies, boundaries, chains of command, and are more stable in form. Scholars have recently called for increased attention to non-traditional settings (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015) or lamented the "standard assumption" (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016) that organization studies is about formal organizations. For instance, O'Doherty, De Cock, Rehn, and Ashcraft (2010), urge scholars to examine the "white spaces" such as non-places (parking lots, waiting areas, etc.), forgotten and abandoned sites, and novel undertheorized locations that exist between the spaces of traditional organizations.

SHIFTING FOCUS TO ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZING

The field of organizational communication has recently begun to shift from a "managerial bias" (Cheney, 2007; Redding, 1979) to embrace studies of nontraditional, unconventional, and non-work forms of organizing. For example, nonprofits (Ganesh & McCallum, 2012), volunteer groups (Lai & Katz, 2016), hidden or shaded organizations (Jensen & Meisenbach, 2015; Scott, 2013), legal brothels (Wolfe & Blithe, 2015), and civic groups (Koschmann, 2016) are receiving increased attention. Moving even further from established non-work organizing, scholars are investigating alternative collective forms such as social movements (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002), fitness tracking communities of practice (Smith & Treem, 2016), online hacker collectives (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) the Yelp Elite squad (Askay & Gossett, 2015), and bicycle commuters (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). Despite this turn toward the existence and analysis of work in nontraditional contexts, we are still left with questions about how boundary-less loosely structured groups achieve collective outcomes. While settings such as fitness tracking communities and legal brothels are far from 'traditional,' these groups are still characterized by some core organizational elements such as adherence to formal institutional regulations, centralized governance, and distinctive membership. This research calls for explanations for how collective outcomes are accomplished in organizations that are more fluid, and in turn potentially precarious. One particular site of fluid collective activity that lacks many traditional organizing hallmarks is the bicycle dirt jump community.

A Brief Introduction to BMX Dirt Jumps

Bicycle motocross, often abbreviated as BMX (Nelson, 2010) began in the early 70's with participants in organized leagues and informal groups racing 20-inch wheeled

bikes around a course resembling that of an off-road motorcycle track. BMX tracks feature rollers, banked turns, and jumps. This dissertation employs a bevy of terms and acronyms that are very particular to the BMX and dirt jump community, but broader audiences may not be familiar with. I explain many of these terms within my findings chapters, but participant quotations also frequently employ these words. To help clarify this research, I provide a glossary of words and phrases in Appendix A. BMX racing eventually led to dirt jump riding. Dirt jump riding involves performing tricks and daring stunts over mounds of dirt instead of racing head to head on a track. While precise data concerning how many individuals participate in the sport is hard to come by, according to the Outdoor Foundation, over 2.1 million adults in the United States participated in BMX bicycling in 2013.

In this dissertation, I conduct research among the community of BMX dirt jump riders in "Appleton" (pseudonym) a large city in the Southern United States. This setting is a loose collective of self-organized BMX bikers that build and maintain dirt jump courses on public property across the greater Appleton area. Unlike a basketball court, baseball diamond, BMX race track, or a cycling velodrome, dirt jump courses are not standardized and vary greatly in layout. Some courses weave in and out of trees, with switchbacks, rollers, and direction reversals throughout the line. Other dirt jump courses take advantage of a downslope in the topography to gain speed. An ideal dirt jump course requires very little pedaling between jumps as the "flow" and momentum of the jumps provides enough speed to carry a rider through the jumps.

Dirt jumps are typically built in an underground fashion by BMX riders, although some local governments and nonprofits have created publicly or sponsor funded dirt jump locations (e.g., Valmont Bike Park in Boulder, CO). Academic research on BMX dirt jumps is sparse. Although outside of the communication discipline, Rinehart and Grenfell's

(2002) comparison of a corporate sponsored BMX park with the nearby user-built BMX park is one of, if not the only, study to focus on dirt jumps. The authors described "the flats," a set of dirt jumps built by children and adolescents, as "an environment of freer play—and risk—existed here, one where, ironically, the work of construction became a part of the play" (p. 306). Similar to "the flats" studied by Rinehart and Greenfell, the dirt jumps I focus on in this study, 18th Street Jumps, are all hand built by riders without the city's approval (see Figure 1.1-1.2). Participating in the dirt jump community is as much about riding the jumps as it is constructing and maintaining them. In the methods section of this dissertation I provide much greater detail about the specific field sites.

The tasks of constructing and maintaining these dirt jumps are carried out solely by the BMX riders that use the park. Building of new jumps often requires either digging up fresh dirt, filtering out the rocks, and stacking into a new form, or tearing down an existing jump and reworking it into a new form. Maintenance of the jumps is an ongoing process that includes, sweeping fine particles of dirt into the cracks of the jump, packing the fresh dirt down, trimming overgrown plants, scraping sediment from the pits of the jumps, and watering the course so the dirt does not harden, crack, and eventually crumble away (see Image 1.3-1.5). By sweeping ultra-fine particles of moist dirt onto the track, one can resurface, or 'butter' the line into a smooth and fast riding surface free of bumps.

Figure 1.1 The 18th Street BMX Dirt Jumps

Figure 1.2 A Rider Jumping an 18th Street BMX Dirt Jump

Figure 1. 3 18th Street BMX Dirt Jump Maintenance

Figure 1.4: 18th Street BMX Dirt Jump Maintenance

Figure 1.5: A BMX rider sweeps fresh dirt on a ‘Texano’ dirt jump.

Chapter 2, Research Design, will provide a more in-depth description of the particular field sites. These field sites are a departure from commonly studied organizations. If we are taking seriously the idea that communication is constitutive of organizing, then the contexts I have briefly described above are not merely understudied areas, or arenas to provide yet another example of what we already know. Instead, I argue that this form of collective action is an ideal testing and building ground for building organizational theory because they lack many of the elements that theorists often grapple with. To explain, if things like mission statements, meetings, documents, rules, email LISTSERVs, buildings, and websites are all communicative elements and events that constitute the organization, then how is an organization communicatively constructed when the site lacks many of those elements? In both settings, work is accomplished through the collective efforts of individuals, yet, there are very few organizational elements guiding their activity. That is, the overarching contribution of this dissertation will be extending

our knowledge of how communication enables or constrains volunteer collective actions in loosely structured ephemeral groups. In order to answer the overall research question, there are three important sub-areas that should be explored.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The findings of this dissertation are structured in three chapters: Chapter 3 concerns the communicative construction of authority, Chapter 4 investigates natural materiality, and Chapter 5 investigates the communicative practices used to negotiate organizational tension. I provide a brief overview of the foundations of each chapter. First, management and organization researchers view authority as central to organizing. Authority was originally conceptualized as a stable and objective element of control that is vested within individuals and positions (Fayol, 1949; Weber, 1946). CCO scholars take a slightly different approach in that authority is distributed among members and often emerges as an organization forms recurrent practices. More specifically, authority is accomplished through "scaled up" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008) texts. Texts can be "concrete" such as documents, policy statements, websites, white papers, etc., or "figurative" in that the text is an abstract representation of "common or valued elements of the group" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1234). Figurative texts become "authoritative texts" when the localized interactions that originally produced the text scale up and become "distanciated" (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996), or distanced from their original circumstances. The distanciation process tends to hide the individual contributions of authors as the text scales up from the original interactions that created it. With the original authors' contributions now hidden, the abstractions appear as a collective accomplishment and are thus perceived as legitimate and authoritative.

Researchers have a solid understanding of how authority emerges in inter-organization collaborations in the public sector (Koschmann & Burk, 2016), firms (Kuhn, 2008), and government collaborations with public organizations (Taylor & Van Every, 2014). Despite these trenchant explanations of how authority is accomplished through communication, we know less about the *specific types* of interactions that ultimately scale up to the level of authoritative text. Furthermore, we need more explanation of how/if authority will function in organizational settings where the degree of organization-ness is questionable. Organizational contexts that lack membership, hierarchy, rules, delimited boundaries, centralized locations, etc., represent an overlooked arena where authority research could be pushed to the limits. Additional research is needed to explore the mechanisms by which particular agents and texts exercise authority, how this authority manifests in contexts of organizing, and the ongoing consequences for processes of organizing. Therefore, research question one is proposed:

> RQ1: How is authority socially constructed among loosely structured volunteer collectives?

Second, CCO scholars have extensively theorized the role of materials in constituting a collective and guiding activity. However, the extant research on "nonhuman agency" (Castor & Cooren, 2006) tends to share the common thread of focusing on human-created material objects leaving one particular form of materiality lost among "the plenum" (Cooren, 2006, 2010) of agencies: the natural material environment. Scholars have also called for a clearer conceptualization of the agency of nature without resorting to dualisms of simply human/nonhuman (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Therefore, the second contribution of this dissertation will be to uncover how the natural material environment

manifests itself among the plenum of agencies and communicates to shape organizing processes. The following research question guides the second portion of the study:

RQ2: How do natural materials and the environment manifest themselves and communicate as part of organizing processes within a fluid volunteer collective?

The third contribution of this dissertation is extending practice theory to contexts where goals are loosely defined and not always shared among those involved in organizing. The practice theory lens is typically utilized in studies of traditional, formal, paid employment organizations. When one takes this perspective and applies it to a more loosely structured and ephemeral form of collective organizing, one finds that some tenets of the approach need adjustment. Namely, the notions of intentionality and "goal oriented" (Leonardi, 2015, p. 246) practice become more complex in this loosely organized non-work context. The fluidity of this collective is also characterized by tension, yet we do not have a strong explanation of what those tensions are. In addition to further developing these tenets of the approach, practice theory can be used to build a theoretical explanation of how social, material, and performative practices balance the tensions of fluid organizing. Research question three guides the practice theory portion of the dissertation:

RQ3[a]: What are the organizational tensions inherent to fluid collective organizing?

RQ3[b]: How do communicative practices adapt to the organizational tensions of fluid collective organizing?

In sum, this dissertation advances organizational communication knowledge in three interrelated ways: by further developing how authoritative texts emerge through communication to guide collective activity, by bringing the natural material environment into theorizing about nonhuman agency and the communicative constitution of organization, and by developing a communicative framework explaining how communicative practices balance the tensions inherent to fluid organizing.

Chapter 2: Research Design

This dissertation follows the logic of a qualitative inductive approach to data collection and analysis. More specifically, this project employs a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; 2014). This grounded theory approach requires "joint collection, coding and analysis of data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 43). The reader should keep in mind that the ordering of the following sections is not meant to imply a strict linear progression and that the research process iteratively moved back and forth between data collection and analysis. A constructivist approach to grounded theory is rooted within the interpretive tradition, whereas objectivist grounded theoretical approaches lean more positivistic in nature. Objectivist approaches to grounded theory aim for 'discovering' the meaning of data, whereas a constructivist approach views data, and the subsequent findings, as a 'construction' through interaction with participants (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist approach is fitting for this research because I view the findings as subjective and constructed through the process of observations and interviews with study participants.

While I do not position this research as a true ethnography, I do employ certain ethnographic methods of data collection. In seeking criteria to evaluate the quality of ethnographic research, Richardson (2000) proposes "self-reflexivity" as key for determining quality. Self-reflexivity prompts the researcher to answer the questions:

> How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgements about the point of view? (p. 254)

Similarly, Charmaz (2014) characterizes constructivist grounded theory as acknowledging subjectivities and engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process. Tracy (2010) further clarifies that transparency and sincerity are key markers of quality in qualitative

research. Researchers should be honest and sincere with the reader about the methodological process, goals, biases, backstage issues, and setbacks along the way. For post-positivist and quantitative studies, it stands to reason that the research process is more straightforward and linear because of the nature of hypothesizing, collecting data, and interpreting results. However, in inductive qualitative research, and ethnographic methods in particular, the process is often characterized by setbacks, triumphs, frustrations, dead ends, sickness, injuries, and differing levels of energy and time expended in the field. As Tracy (2012) claims, many researchers "enter the field with sensitizing concepts and preliminary guiding research questions" (p. 114) but these researchers also:

> Begin living, collecting and analyzing data long before they know the focus of their study or what level of data access they will be able to negotiate. They begin with a life experience and/or a rough idea of topic; they gather data, analyze data along the way, and tag back and forth to the literature to reframe and redirect their study…in short, many researchers do not know the specific issues they will write about until they are well into data collection, analysis, and writing (p. 114)

In order to fulfill the criteria of self-reflexivity, sincerity, and transparency, I utilize the first section of this chapter to discuss my background in relation to the research project. As Tracy (2012) notes, researchers may not fully know in advance precisely what topics they will write about until sustained engagement in the field. Throughout this chapter, I aim to be fully transparent about how I entered the field site with broad questions, and then refined down through data collection and analysis. At times these details may appear irrelevant to the findings, however, I feel that transparency around *how* the research process actually unfolded to be a worthy pursuit for establishing credibility.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER AND PROJECT FORMULATION

I have been riding bicycles since I was a child, but I did not seriously turn attention to mountain biking until May 2011. I rode full suspension mountain bikes on cross country

trails and downhill ski resort jump trails for four years before gravitating to the dirt jump scene. The mountain bike world and the BMX dirt jump scene are similar in that both sports often involve jumping a bicycle over mounds of dirt, but there are still distinctions between the two. For one, the equipment used to participate in each sport differs. BMX dirt jump bicycles are much smaller (20 to 22 inch wheels) compared to the larger 26 to 29 inch wheeled mountain bikes. The fact that I ride a 26 inch dirt jump mountain bike with front suspension sets me apart from the typical BMX rider—an aspect that proved valuable during later stage data collection.

Having written my master's thesis on the use of Strava (a digital fitness tracking application) among mountain and road bikers, I was eager to pursue a PhD in a location rife with outdoor recreation research opportunities so that I could continue this line of research. I knew that "Appleton" [all locations and names are pseudonyms] had a strong mountain bike and road bike scene, so I looked into applying to the PhD program in organizational communication offered at a university in the city of Appleton. Before applying, I searched the web to see if the many types of biking I was interested in, including freeride, downhill, dirt jumping, and cross country riding, were possible in or near Appleton. This search uncovered what became my first digital encounter with the primary field site: the 18th Street BMX jumps. I found many videos and photos of the 18th street dirt jumps located on 18th street in downtown Appleton, as well as videos of the Apple Creek dirt jumps and other concrete skateparks.

My first physical encounter with the primary field site of this dissertation was in March of 2014 during a graduate student recruitment weekend at the university in Appleton. It was during free time from this recruitment weekend that I was able to ride at 18th street for the first time. At the time I was astounded at the location of 18th Street being right in the middle of downtown Appleton. In 2014 there were few public dirt jump parks

featuring such large jumps—especially not in the area of South Carolina that I moved from—so I was truly amazed that the location existed in such a dense urban environment. It also piqued my interest because Appleton had been experiencing rapid growth over the past decade, and the plot of land the jumps occupied was likely prime real estate. This first visit planted the seed of curiosity that would eventually lead me to focus my dissertation on the space.

I moved to Appleton in fall of 2014 to begin the PhD program in organizational communication. I spent the weekends of my first semester searching out the various dirt jump locations in town. Sprinkled throughout Appleton, often tucked away in the forgotten spaces of the city or on undeveloped lands, are hand-built dirt bicycle jumps up to 15 feet high. Some of these BMX dirt jumps are public and visible, whereas others are relatively hidden from public knowledge. The most visible recreation spaces are a public good, benefitting riders of all ages by providing an outlet for exercise, creativity, and personal fulfillment right in the middle of a city. Within the first few months of living in Appleton I was able to make connections within the mountain bike community and with a few people who rode both mountain bikes and dirt jumps. During this time frame I mainly viewed the dirt jump locations as a hobby and not as a focus of research.

Gaining Access

In June of 2015, I traveled to Colorado and Utah to ride dirt jumps and downhill mountain bikes. Unfortunately, I broke my collarbone while dirt jumping in Frisco, CO and the trip ended early. Back in Appleton, I was unable to ride while recovering from surgery, and was not currently enrolled in summer classes, so I went to 18th street in the afternoons to hang out, watch others ride, and help dig (to the extent my injury allowed). It was not until the late summer of 2015 that I began to seriously consider 18th street, and

the surrounding BMX spots, as a potential site of study. For most of July and August 2015, I went to 18th street 4 to 5 nights a week to help dig and maintain the jumps. I regularly visited the field site throughout the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016, and on March 21st 2016, I began to keep an excel spreadsheet of hours spent in the field participating and observing.

The summer of 2015 spent observing and helping to build the dirt jumps proved crucial for allowing me to gain access to the space. This time spent digging provided me with a small level of credibility among the 18th Street participants which later allowed me to be able to interview some of them. Often times riders from other dirt jump locations around town would come to 18th Street and I would get to know them better, connect with them on social media, and be invited to other more obscure spots. As my collar bone began to heal, I was able to more fully participate and ride my bike at 18th Street and the other locations around town.

THE PRIMARY FIELD SITE: 18TH STREET DIRT JUMPS

The primary site of study is the 18th street dirt jumps (see Figure 2.1-2.3), but I also provide some detail of the larger action sports community in Appleton to contextualize the study.

Figure 2.1: A photo from the mid-nineties of the hip jump at 18th Street

Figure 2.2: A rider jumps the quarter pipe at 18th Street circa 2017

Figure 2.3: 18th Street Dirt Jump Maintenance

The Appleton BMX scene has roots that go back to the founding of BMX as a sport. The city of Appleton has two public skate parks, one of which is a 1.7-million-dollar, state-of-the-art park frequented by BMX cyclists. Appleton has even hosted the ESPN X-Games, a televised extreme sports contest for athletes all over the world, for several years. It is worth noting that there are many more riding spots around Appleton that are not dirt jumps. For example, two local bicycle stores have large plywood vertical ramps or half pipes on their property. There are numerous concrete drainage ditches, handrails (for jumping and grinding down), backyard ramps, and empty swimming pools that attract BMX riders to Appleton. All of these riding spots serve to support a user base of BMX and dirt jump enthusiasts in Appleton.

The 18th street dirt jumps sit on a small patch of public land next to the flood plain of a nearby creek. Similar to the makeshift ramps constructed by skateboarders on "forgotten spaces" (Dupont, 2014), the dirt jumps were hand built by riders in the early 90s without the city's approval. The city of Appleton has threatened to destroy the jumps in the past—a fact that constantly hangs over 18th street members' heads. On several occasions, 18th street riders referenced a day when city officials came out to evaluate the land. City officials had drafted plans to build a human foosball court (a life-sized version of the popular table soccer game commonly found in arcades and bars) and brought the sketch to 18th street. Eighteenth street members laughed at the idea and disliked the thought of something like that being built on the jumps. Although I was not able to attend the meeting, several riders stated that some of the regular riders organized through social media to come down to the 18th Street and express support for the jumps. A local professional rider also came to the meeting and signed autographs and took photos with fans. Despite a few threats of development over the years, the spot remains active today with five main "lines" for riding: the pump track, beginner line, intermediate line, advanced line, and a secondary advanced line. In the middle of the park is an area most refer to as the "street course." This area contains a six-foot-tall quarter pipe and other mounds of dirt that mimic a concrete BMX park. The park constantly evolves. The placement of the primary jumps on these lines tends to remain constant, but the steepness and angle of the jumps change as different individuals work on them.

In this dissertation I am primarily focused on the day-to-day activities of ordinary riders that contribute to the survival of the park. It should be noted that a nonprofit organization operating as 18th Street BMX has been gaining momentum over the past 4 years. The nonprofit is headed primarily by one individual, but also holds stakeholder meetings on a regular basis with long time participants of the collective. The nonprofit

mostly fulfills higher level functions, such as fundraising for tools, promoting occasional dig days, interacting with the city and parks foundation, and promoting special events around holidays. The nonprofit is undoubtedly important to 18th Street's survival, however, my focus in this dissertation is on the day-to-day sporadic contributions and interactions that help to sustain the space. The additional field sites I detail below do not have a nonprofit wing.

Additional Field Sites

Eighteenth Street is the focal point of this study, but it is important to mention the other locations that BMX riders frequent as I often visited these locations. There are five other dirt jump locations around Appleton that vary in their degree of openness and accessibility to the public. For instance, two of the larger dirt jump locations in town are hidden from public view and the community of diggers and riders maintain tighter control over who knows about and can participate at these spots. There are also jump locations in the greenbelt of the city that are not as smooth as BMX dirt jumps, but are frequented by mountain bikers and dirt jump riders alike. I have participated in or conducted observations at all of these locations at one time or another, but the bulk of the observation hours of this research occurred at 18th Street, the Texano dirt jumps, and Apple Creek Pump Track. It is hard to draw firm boundaries and only observe one dirt jump location as riders from 18th Street often frequented the various dirt jump and concrete spots and would converse about 18th Street while at the other location and vice versa.

The Apple Creek Pump Track is located north of downtown Appleton within a city park that already contains a network of mountain bike trails. Around 2011 a mountain biker started building a small pump track near a creek in the park and the trail set grew from there. The jumps at Apple Creek Pump track are all table tops and relatively small

compared to other spots. This course was originally designed to accommodate riders of all skill sets, disciplines, and ages. As different sets of builders have rotated in and out of the Apple Creek Pump Track, the jumps have changed in steepness, difficulty, and shape. The Texano jumps are also just north of Apple Creek, but cater to a more advanced style of riding. While participants stated that riders had been building jumps in the Texano space since 2010, the jumps came to be known as 'Texano' around 2014 when a new crew of builders dedicated more time to the space. Like Apple Creek and 18th Street, the Texano jumps are on undeveloped city property near a creek. Although I did not spend much time observing at the Red Box dirt jumps (due to lack of activity in the space) the jumps are a central part of the story of the Appleton BMX scene. The Red Box dirt jumps are located near downtown Appleton and have a long and complicated history that stems from the city attempting to provide a space for BMX riders to build jumps after they tore down an illegal trail set. I discuss more about the history of Red Box jumps in Chapter 5. Apple Creek, Texano, and Red Box dirt jumps are unlike 18th Street in that they are a little more challenging to find as they are tucked away from a main highway in a thicket of trees.

Additionally, I have spent the past four summers traveling around the United States, Canada, and Prague, Czech Republic, riding mountain bikes and visiting other dirt jump locations. Within Texas, I have visited dirt jumps in Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Lubbock. Within broader North America, I have visited both public and private dirt jumps in Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and British Columbia, Canada. The focal point of this study is 18th Street, however, the trips to these other locations often illuminated concepts developed at my local field sites. Although I have visited many dirt jump locations over the past four years that undoubtedly provided me with a solid understanding of the BMX dirt jump scene, in the following section I report the observational hours data from Apple Creek, and

Texano as I consider these two field sites to be the most complementary to 18th Street. Individuals that participate at 18th Street often visit Texano or Apple Creek to ride or help maintain the course.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this study included interviews, observation, and social media post analysis. This research is covered by an institutional review board review that granted a waiver of obtaining written informed consent. Before detailing each, it is important to discuss my role as a researcher, as that shaped the types of questions I was able to ask. When I moved to Appleton in 2014 I entered a BMX world that was previously unknown to me. Over the years, I slowly learned more and more about the BMX culture. I detailed earlier that the type of bicycle I ride sets me apart from most BMX riders. My mountain bike background, coupled with having recently moved to Appleton, allowed me to ask questions about the scene that a fully embedded participant would not ask. As I spent more time in the various dirt jump settings, my status as a newcomer began to fade away. Although no longer a newcomer, I do not consider myself to be completely native to the scene. My position is very close to what others have described as "liminal" (Turner, 1969), in that I am between inside and outside of the scene. In sum, my reflexive position as a 26-inch dirt jump rider strikes a nice balance between being able to fit in at the scene, but also being able to see things from a somewhat outside perspective.

Scholars also have an ethical obligation to remain honest with participants about their role in the scene as a researcher. In many traditional organizational research projects, the researcher goes through a gatekeeper to gain entry to the organization. Members of the organization under study usually know that the new person in the scene is an academic researcher. Conversely, I was able to simply show up at many of the dirt jump locations

and begin observing without negotiating access from an institutional gatekeeper. In instances where I asked a participant for an interview, I was able to fully explain my role as a researcher. However, in instances of only observation without an interview my status as a researcher was revealed differently. While digging with other 18th street participants, or just hanging out in general, the topic of 'so what do you do?' often emerged in conversation. I used this as an opportunity to briefly mention that I am a graduate student interested in learning more about recreational organizing. I usually avoided mentioning 'doctoral' or 'PhD' because I felt that the words may carry a connotation that would further separate me from the participants. In almost every instance the other riders responded with "oh, cool" or "neat" and did not ask for further details. A few participants asked for more information, and I explained a little bit more about my research, the organizational communication PhD program, and the overall dissertation.

Interviews

I utilized a mixture of informant interviews, field interviews, and ethnographic interviews. Field interviews are a minimally structured way of obtaining information through discourse that moves beyond a simple question-answer format (Keyton, 2001). These interviews were semi-structured throughout the data collection process so as to allow the respondent to expand and elaborate on topics. I conducted interviews not only as a questioner, but also as a listener who was flexible to emerging topics. For instance, I began the research by using the protocol listed in Appendix B. This protocol was very detailed and reflects some of my initial curiosities. For instance, at the outset of the project I was also interested in issues of helmet and safety gear use, perceptions of risk taking behaviors, and the use of helmet cameras to create action sports content—as such the interview guide includes questions about those topics. As the project evolved over the years, and in keeping

with an emergent inductive approach to research, my focus narrowed slightly to explore the intersection of communication with organizing in this setting. Therefore, the interview protocol details far more questions than were actually asked in the course of interviewing and this guide represents a very early version of my research plans.

As the project advanced, the interview protocol evolved into a list of main idea talking points. Indeed, a core tenet of grounded theory is "theoretical sampling" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a method for generating theory "whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them" (p. 45) so that theory can be emergently developed. This process of joint collection and coding refined the detailed protocol down to the list of talking points.

The "informant interview" differs slightly from the casual field interview (Lindlof & Taylor 2011, p. 177). An informant is a "veteran of the scene" (p. 177) who has deep knowledge of the group's lingo, customs, rituals, and history. Through my four years of participation at 18th Street, I was able to identify and maintain contact with a handful of people that fit the role of informant. Both informant and field interviews were audio recorded.

Unlike field interviews or informant interviews, "ethnographic interviews" (Spradley, 1979) are more spontaneous in nature and were not audio recorded. Described as "a casual exchange of remarks" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 176), the ethnographic interview often occurs during downtime in the scene or a break in the action. Unlike many traditional studies of organizations, 18th Street is not a work environment wherein participants are 'on the clock.' This leisurely setting allowed ample opportunities for striking up informal ethnographic interviews without pulling participants away from employer-mandated obligations. However, the fact that participants were not 'clocked in' at set times also posed a challenge for gathering data. Whereas in a formal organization

one can set rigid hours of observation that mirror the organization's operating hours, the participation and activity within 18th Street varies greatly depending on time of day, season, and weather. On some days, I observed at 18th street for 3 hours or more without anyone coming by the park. Other days there were 10 or more people already there when I arrived.

I used a combination of snowball sampling and recruiting from within the field site to gather interviews. Charmaz (2014) suggests using "initial sampling" (p. 197) as a way to get started. The criteria of my initial sample was relatively loose, in that I sought out any BMX participants that rode or hung out at dirt jump locations. Interviews were conducted in one-on-one settings at private residences, the dirt jumps, and a restaurant. In one instance, an interview started as a one-on-one interview at a local skatepark, but other individuals chimed into the conversation as they recognized the interviewee and came over to our location. All digitally recorded interviews were transcribed into a digital document format. As of March 2019, I have conducted 19 qualitative interviews (2 female, 17 male) with BMX participants totaling 19 hours and 5 minutes with an average interview length of one hour (range: 23 minutes to 1hr 54 minutes). A challenge of this research has been obtaining a gender balanced sample. I specifically sought out the two female participants of this study and asked for a referral to more female BMX dirt jump riders. Indeed, when I asked "Dina" (each participant's name in this study is concealed by a pseudonym) why it was so challenging to find female participants, she revealed:

> Dina: In Appleton, I don't know that there are any ladies that regularly dig at trail spots . . . I guess if I had—there's probably not that many from what I know. I could have no idea, but maybe five?
>
> Roth: In Appleton?
>
> Dina: For all over the country.

Dina is pretty well connected to the group of female BMX riders in Appleton. She knew quite a few females that ride BMX at concrete parks, but could not recall any in Appleton that dig at BMX dirt jumps. Indeed, in only one or two observation sessions did I observe females participating in digging or maintenance of the course.

Field Notes and Observations

I assumed a "participant-as-observer" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) role while in the field site. This role allowed for active participation in the scene. I recorded fieldnotes in order to capture observations from the field. The 18th street dirt jumps are often dirty and muddy. Because the field setting was not conducive to typing formal fieldnotes on a laptop, a combination of "fieldnotes" and "headnotes" were used. Crafting fieldnotes is a method for coherently recording and narrating observations and interpretations of action occurring in the scene (Wolcott, 2005). I took notes in the field by recording observations by hand in a notebook—a process some refer to as "scratch notes" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 157). The scratch notes were largely descriptive, providing rich specific detail of occurrences in the scene. The left hand margin of the scratch notes page was reserved for higher-level annotations and analytic reflections. These raw scratch were organized and converted into a polished digital document format within 24 hours after leaving the scene. Within the findings of this dissertation, bits of dialogue that were recorded verbatim are enclosed in quotation marks and words that I do not have an exact record of are enclosed in single quotation marks. The majority of participant quotations reported in this dissertation were taken verbatim from audio recorded interviews. There are only a handful of statements recorded in field notes that are reported upon in the findings.

In many instances, I was actively involved in riding or building jumps and could not immediately write in a notebook. In other situations, it would have been perceived as

obtrusive to start writing in a notebook. For those situations, "headnotes" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) sufficed for recording observations. Headnotes are specific mental snapshots of action or dialogue made while in the scene. These mental snippets were recorded as soon as possible. While engaged in fieldwork it was not difficult to take a break from the action and jot headnotes down in my notebook. In situations where my backpack containing my notebook was too far away from the action, I was able to type a quick note onto my smartphone without disrupting the action in the scene.

Having the smartphone not only helped with surreptitiously recording field notes, I was also able to quickly take photographs of things within the scene. For instance, during one observation session a participant used an interesting method to pack the dirt down, so I took a quick photo for later reference. Many of the photos presented as data within this dissertation are original photos that I captured at the scene. I also have access to a helmet camera and aerial drone that I used, partly for personal enjoyment, but also to document the shape, size, and location of the jumps.

I also maintained a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to record the days, times, and locations of observation sessions. The Excel sheet was set to sync with an online cloud storage database to back up my observational hours data. Unfortunately, after the hard drive on my laptop crashed, I discovered that the syncing function had paused on 11/5/2017. As a result of the hard drive crash and the Excel sheet not syncing, I lost the specific detailed hours and sessions of observation between 11/5/2017 and 10/8/2018. Fortunately, just before the hard drive crashed, I had reported the total number of hours spent observing in another conference paper and was thus able to reconstruct that 88.5 hours were spent in the field between 11/5/2017 and 10/8/2018, but I was not able to recover the specific locations of observation within that time frame. As of March 1st 2019, I have conducted 287 total hours of participant observation, with 131.5 hours conducted at 18th Street. The remaining

155.5 hours of observation include sessions at 18th Street (and other locations) that occurred between 11/5/2017 and 10/8/2018, sessions at Apple Creek, and as detailed in the "Additional Field Sites" presented earlier, the wide range of other dirt jump locations, concrete skateparks, and greenbelt jump locations around Appleton. Observation sessions ranged from short 30-minute stops at the field site during the week, to longer eight-hour sessions on weekends. As detailed in the "interviews" section, setting a rigid schedule of observation in such a fluid and loose setting would be a fool's errand because individuals participate on random days, at random times, and for varied lengths of time. The fluidity of participation in the field site helps to explain the varied range of observation sessions.

Social Media & Photographic Data

As the project progressed, I realized that online interactions were a key site where issues of coordinating and organizing tended to unfold. After amending the IRB approval to include online social media interactions, I began to capture screenshots of online content, primarily Instagram photos and comment chains, that related to 18th Street and dirt jump building more broadly. Each captured screenshot was stored on a password protected hard drive. Having my smartphone in the field site also proved useful for capturing photographs of things in the field. Many of the photos presented in this dissertation were captured by my smartphone in the field sites.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this section I describe in broad strokes my approach to data analysis. Within each individual chapter I provide more specific details as to the methodological variations utilized in that particular study. Analysis of data followed the method described in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory can be considered a

philosophy of research that aims to discover and develop theory as it emerges from data. The approach is in opposition to the logico-deductive model of theory building because initial research decisions are not based on preconceived theoretical frameworks. There are three different branches of grounded theory analysis; Glaserian (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998), Straussian (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and Charmaz' constructivist grounded theory (2000, 2006, 2014). The constructivist approach to grounded theory was fitting for this research for two reasons. First, the constructivist approach acknowledges the subjective position of the researcher and the nature of theory as 'constructed' by the researcher. I believe it is important to bear in mind my own subjective position in relation to the research site. Therefore, any theory emerging through the process should be understood as a *construction* interpreted from my unique position. Second, the constructivist version of grounded theory is less rigid in application, unlike earlier positivist leaning versions of grounded theory. This flexibility proved useful in this study as I adapted to contingencies in the field sites.

The initial stages of this dissertation were marked mostly by data collection. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) state, "at the beginning, there is more collection than coding and analysis; the balance then gradually changes until near the end when the research involves mostly analysis" (p. 72). In keeping with a grounded theory approach, data collection, coding, and analysis occurred in iterative stages. Once interviews were recorded they were transcribed into a digital document format and imported into Dedoose—a cloud based qualitative analysis platform that allows for easily coding and sorting data. Before beginning coding of the data, I conducted a "data immersion" (Tracy, 2013, p. 188) stage wherein I thoroughly read and re-read each transcript or field note. This step helped to provide an overall feel for what the participants stated in the interviews, and my own reflections from the field site.

I conducted initial line-by-line coding as a first-cycle round of coding. The goal of "initial" coding is "to remain open to all possible theoretical directions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114). In this stage, I did not apply any a priori constructs, but instead focused on the actions and events in the data. These first-cycle codes were a combination of "initial" (also referred to as open codes; Charmaz, 2006), descriptive, and in-vivo codes. For instance, a text excerpt about Instagram was descriptively coded as 'SOCIAL MEDIA' whereas the in-vivo code of 'DIGGING' was applied to a text excerpt wherein a participant discussed their technique for digging. Some of the codes contained subcodes or 'child' codes. For example, the code of 'ETIQUETTE' was applied to text excerpts about generally accepted and expected forms of conduct within the site. The subcode of 'ETIQUETTE-FOR RIDING' was applied to text excerpts mentioning how someone should behave *specifically* while riding bikes at 18th Street. The subcodes allowed for more extensive indexing and categorizing of the data. Although I did not apply codes based on extant theory, I worked with organizationally related "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer, 1969; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in mind. Each stage of coding was characterized by a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which I continuously compared and distinguished between data and codes. As new data were collected, I continued this thorough first cycle coding method with the existing codes, but also created new codes as new insights emerged from the data.

I used focused and process coding as a second-cycle coding method. Focused coding is more analytical in nature than initial coding. In this stage of coding the goal is to hone in on the emerging areas of theoretical promise. This particular step varied depending on the aims of each study, and I report greater detail within each study chapter. However, I provide one broad example of focused coding. In this step, the disparate codes were clustered together into tentative categories. For example, the in-vivo code of 'NO DIG NO RIDE' taken directly from an interviewee's statement, was grouped into the 'MANTRA'

category. Process codes focus on the gerunds ("-ing" words) in the data. The process code is meant to capture action in the data. I used axial coding in the final round of data analysis. Axial coding develops how the first-cycle codes revolve around the "axis" of a dominant category. This step of the analysis allowed for beginning to identify connections between the categories and themes.

Throughout the iterative data collection, analysis, and literature review process, I constantly engaged in "memo-writing" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 164). According to Charmaz (2014), memo writing "encourages you to stop, focus, take your codes and data apart, compare them, and define links between them" (p. 164). As I analyzed my data, I kept a running document of interesting observations about the data, noteworthy relationships between initial codes, or areas of further inquiry. Memo writing helped me to develop the three research topics pursued in this dissertation. As I studied the initial codes, field notes, and analytical memos, I noticed that all three forms of data seemed to coalesce around the theoretical concepts of authority, the natural environment, and actions (i.e., practices) that prompted people to contribute to the collective activity. Working with the sensitizing concepts helped me to find links between the analytical memos and existing organizational communication knowledge.

At this point in the analysis, I began to develop categories of the emerging theory. "Theoretical sampling" (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allowed me to pursue the data that helped to further develop the properties of these categories. This type of sampling should not be confused with sampling to address research questions or sampling to reflect population distributions. In true grounded theory style theoretical sampling, "the researcher chooses any groups that will help generate, to the fullest extent, as many properties of the categories as possible, and that will help relate categories to each other and their properties" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49). Coding and analysis continued until a point of "saturation"

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I use the term saturation not only to indicate that "no additional data are being found" (p. 61), but also to signal that I have "defined, checked, and explained relationships" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 213) within and between categories. While quantity of codes applied is certainly not a proxy for quality of findings, listing the number of codes can give the reader an idea of the rigor of the analysis. At the conclusion of my coding process, Dedoose listed 197 distinct codes applied 2,857 times to 1,216 text excerpts. An excerpt is a portion of coded data from the larger interview. Each individual chapter's method section will detail the data analysis for that particular study with greater specificity.

Drawing upon data analysis strategies of Corbin and Strauss (2015), I crafted diagrams—a process of "dialoguing with data and moving the analysis further" (p. 106). Particularly for Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, I drafted diagrams, maps, conceptual maps, and figures using pencil and paper to help tease out relationships while constructing theory. These diagrams were often rudimentary rascals that required continual rewriting and refining—a process aided by the use of many pencils, erasers, and dry-erase boards. Diagrams made visible the connections and relationships between individual codes and themes in my data. Diagramming often started by clustering together similar codes, field notes, and photographic images and then drawing connections between those forms of data and larger constructs. For instance, the model presented in Chapter 5 is the result of at least six different drafts of an early diagram. Other "abstract situational maps" (Clarke, 2003) were used primarily as an analytic exercise to make sense of the larger picture. Clarke's (2003) abstract situational maps were particularly helpful given the focus on nonhuman agency and materiality throughout this study. Clarke states that this form of diagramming, "should include all analytically pertinent human and nonhuman, material and symbolic/discursive elements of a particular situation as framed by those in it *and* by *the analyst* [emphasis original]" (p. 561). In other words, Clarke suggests the researcher map,

or diagram, what human and nonhuman elements seem to matter in a given social setting. This form of abstract situational mapping especially aided in the theorizing of natural materiality undertaken in Chapter 4.

RIGOR

I took steps to ensure that this research was rigorous and credible. Tracy (2010) proposes eight "big-tent criteria" for evaluating qualitative research. By Tracy's standards, a project rich in rigor is marked by sufficient time in the field, sufficient sample sizes, and appropriate data collection and analysis. Given the length of time I have spent in the field (287 hours over a 4-year time frame), the number of interviews I have conducted (n = 19), and the thoroughness with which I have described data analysis, I feel that this study meets her criteria for rigor. Furthermore, as detailed at the opening of this chapter, scholars encourage "self-reflexivity" (Richardson, 2000), sincerity, and transparency (Tracy, 2010) as criteria for qualitative research. My hope is that this methods chapter has provided the reader with enough details and honest self-reflection on the research process to meet these criteria. Other criteria of quality, such as thick descriptions, and meaningful coherence, are established through the findings.

Chapter 3: The Social Construction and Consequences of Paradoxical Authoritative Texts in Fluid Collective Action

Authority is a key component of coordinating activity in organizations (Taylor & Van Every, 2011). Dating back to Weber (1946) and Fayol (1949) traditional notions of authority were tied to position within an organizational hierarchy. That is, rational-legal or legitimate authority is part of the chain of command. In more contemporary forms of organizing, scholars treat authority as a negotiated phenomenon between organizational members that transcends hierarchies and official positions or titles (Kahn & Kram, 1994). In particular, the Montreal School variant of communication as constitutive of organization (CCO; Cooren, 2009, 2010; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) theory considers authority as distributed among various agents and emergent from interaction (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009). More specifically, recent research on "authoritative texts" (Kuhn, 2008) has shown how authority emerges from communicative interaction to guide activity.

Though scholars increasingly recognize the diversity actors and contexts that can enact authority, there is a need for more theoretical explanation around the *specific types* of interaction that give rise to authoritative texts. One specific area for development is explanation of how authoritative texts discipline members. Additionally, there is an opportunity to expand the analysis of authoritative texts beyond single, traditional sites of organizing. Prior case study research provides excellent depth, but, as is customary with case-based research, lacks the breadth to show if authoritative texts can travel beyond a single organization. More research is needed to uncover if authoritative texts can scale up and guide activity across multiple sites of organizing. Underpinning each of these gaps is the fact that most research into authoritative texts is focused on more stable forms of organizing, often taking an employer/employee context as standard. We are missing an

explanation of how authoritative texts emerge and operate in "fluid" social collectives (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schreyögg & Sydow's, 2010). Many volunteer activities occur underneath the umbrella of established organizations, such as nonprofits, religious organizations, or public charities (Kramer, Lewis, & Gossett, 2013). Other forms of volunteering that have received less scholarly attention can be considered "fluid" in that volunteers make contributions outside of established organizations, often on an ad-hoc basis. This form of organizing may lack defined membership, leadership, or delimited boundaries. Community gardens, public art installations, hiking trails, natural areas, community 'free boxes,' or communal meeting areas, often exist without financial support or oversight from local governments or organizations and are constructed/maintained through fleeting and improvisational volunteer actions. It is important to understand how authority emerges from interaction to guide activity—particularly when enduring elements of organization—are absent from these fluid forms of organizing.

My justification is not simply that authority has not been examined in fluid collectives, but that the enduring elements of more formal organizations likely play a role in the formation of those authoritative texts. The CCO tradition has well-established that organization emerges from communication. Therefore, the problematic of this study is not the ability of communication to constitute organization, but specifically how the conversation text dialectic scales up in environments that lack material and structural features of organizing (e.g., buildings, meeting rooms, set times of participation) that facilitate that scaling process.

TEXTUAL AGENTS & THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF AUTHORITY

In order to understand the CCO perspective on authority it is necessary to briefly detail how conversations and text come to constitute organization. In the Montreal school

CCO perspective, “coorientation systems” (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996) are the bedrock of organizing. Coorientation systems consist of a self-organizing loop between *conversation* and *text*. *Conversation* is the localized observable communicative interaction of actors, whereas *text* is the “subject matter and goal of interpretations” (p. 4) that were generated during the conversation. The texts generated in conversation “scale up” (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008; Taylor et al., 1996) and gain distance (i.e., “degrees of separation”) through the “distanciation” process. An extended example of film production will help to make these ideas more concrete.

In the *conversation* stage a film Director converses with the Director of Photography (DP) about a particular film noir style mixed with science-fiction cinematic look they hope to achieve for an upcoming production. Their shared interpretation generates the *text* of ‘noir sci-fi’ to guide their interactions around the upcoming film. At the second “degree of separation,” a Set Decorator and Script Supervisor discuss the original conversation between the Director and DP. While the director and DP are not physically present in this conversation, the Set Decorator refers to the *text* of ‘noir sci-fi’ as a basis for decisions about dialogue and set pieces. At the third degree of separation, the Executive Producer works with the Line Producer to generate a memo about the ‘noir sci-fi’ look, thereby inscribing the original text into a permanent and distributable form. The remainder of the film crew draw on, sometimes adjusting or altering, the ‘noir sci-fi’ *text* when making decisions about casting roles, scripts, and filming locations. That is, the *text* helps organize their actions around a common objective but their subsequent interactions about ‘noir sci-fi’ may alter the shared meaning of the text. The film is a runaway success among movie critics. Soon a subgenre of ‘noir sci-fi’ cinema emerges—representing the fourth degree of separation. At the fifth degree of separation, film school textbooks describe how to achieve the cinematic look of ‘noir sci-fi.’

A few things to note about this extended example. First, the text of 'noir sci-fi' is "simultaneously the input to, and outcomes of, conversation" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1233), meaning actors at each degree of separation (e. g., Script Supervisor, Producer) draw upon the *text* as a guide for *conversation* but may also alter precisely what the shared meaning and look of 'noir sci-fi' is. The original words spoken in the *conversation* between the Director and DP have largely "vanished" (Taylor & Van Every, 2011) as the text gains distance, "scales up" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008) or becomes "distanciated" (Taylor et al., 1996), through the degrees of separation. Acknowledging the role that these oral, written, and distributable texts play in ongoing organizing processes helped to overcome an "overreliance on face-to-face interaction" (Cooren, 2004, p. 374) that preoccupied discourse analysts for years.

Authoritative texts. In the CCO line of thinking, authority is accomplished through special forms of these "scaled up" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008) texts—"authoritative texts" (Kuhn, 2008). Texts can be "concrete" such as documents, policy statements, websites, white papers, etc., or "figurative" in that the text is an abstract representation of "common or valued elements of the group" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1234). Texts are "rarely unitary or monolithic" rather, they can be considered as "networks of meaning" (p. 135). Figurative texts become "authoritative texts" when the localized interactions that originally produced the text scale up and become distanced from their original circumstances. The distanciation process tends to hide the individual contributions of authors as the text scales up from the original interactions that created it. For example, the film director and DP's original conversation has long vanished. With the original authors' contributions now hidden, the abstractions appear as a collective accomplishment and are thus perceived as legitimate and authoritative. The texts exert authority when "presentified" (Cooren, 2006) or "incarnated" (Cooren, 2010)—the process of being made

visible and relevant in an interaction. Of course, one must recognize and accept the authority of the text in order for it to have an impact on their activities. The authoritative text disciplines by encouraging actors "to subordinate personal interests to the collective good" (Kuhn, 2008, p.1236). Overall, authority is not tied to position, rather, authority is a phenomenon that is constructed and negotiated by organizational actors.

Koschmann (2013) studied "City Partners," an interorganizational collaboration (IOC) seeking to improve social outcomes within a community. Through field observations, document analysis, and interviews with members, he found that collective identity emerged as an authoritative text to guide activity. After struggling to figure out precisely what the IOC should be about, one member suggested during a meeting that the IOC's job may be likened to keeping an eye on the gauges of a dashboard of a car. The "dashboard" statement was then recorded into meeting minutes, repeated in future conversations, and eventually scaled up to the level of authoritative text. In this example, many of the elements of formal organizing (e. g., official meetings, membership, meeting minutes) provided the context that allowed for the communicative emergence of an authoritative text.

Additional work by Koschmann and Burk (2016) within a federal government scientific laboratory revealed how authority in collaborative settings entails both the authoring and de- authoring of texts. In order for an authoritative text to lose its status, members must undo the "vanishing" act of the original conversation by "recontextualizing an authoritative text back to its original circumstances" (Koschmann & Burk, 2016, p. 410). In this particular example, the authoritative text of "wild wild west" created a mentality of 'everyone for him or herself' and 'do what you gotta do' among the workers. The "wild wild west" authoritative text told workers how to act and make decisions in the laboratory. The individualism associated with the "wild wild west" led to coordination and

collaboration problems, as well as a hazardous materials accident. When a new lab facility was constructed, various agents worked to de-author the "wild wild west" text by associating it with the disorganization and individual nature of the old lab facility.

In keeping with IOC examples, Koschmann, Kopczynski, Opdyke, and Javernick-Will's (2017) study of disaster relief coordination revealed how authority is socially constructed, contested, and negotiated among multiple agencies. The authors' analysis focused on the interactions between established organizations, such as the Red Cross, and fledgling relief organizations established in the wake of a natural disaster. The nascent relief organization often constructed authority through positioning themselves in opposition to, or relation with, other entities (donors, NGOs, UNICEF, local governments). Koschmann et al. state, "the shelter cluster meetings were key sites for authority construction among the organizations and agencies" and the fledgling relief organization, "used this as an opportunity to assert their authority in face of skepticism about their work" (p. 14). In other scenarios, printed guidelines and standards for operation were drawn upon, not as a final authoritative source, but as "discursive resources" (p. 15) used to construct authority among other groups. In the Koschmann et al. example, authority was created through more formalized communicative elements, such as meetings and guidelines.

While not focusing exclusively on authoritative *texts*, other scholars have examined the communicative negotiation of authority in high reliability organizing (HRO) where one might expect a traditional hierarchy. Jahn's (2016) study of a wildland firefighting team found that the hierarchy was only loosely followed, and most firefighters viewed each other as "on an equal playing field" in terms of expertise and experience (p. 379). Within this team, safety rules were "leveraged" by "invoking them as trump cards to establish authority between members" (p. 381). The safety rules were "ventriloquized", or made to actively participate in organizing processes, by organizational members to bolster their own

authority. These studies provide robust insight into the social construction of authority in inter- organizational collaboration and high-reliability organizing.

Most of the empirical research into authoritative texts focuses on their emergence in more formalized organizing settings. Kuhn's original formulation of authoritative texts was part of a larger argument explaining how firms are engaged in infinite games of marshaling consent and attracting capital. The very development of authoritative text as a concept was born out of explanations of how managerial firms operate. Indeed, the seminary example of an authoritative text is based on re-interpreting a case study of GM's managerial practices (Freeland, 2001) and Xerox repairpersons work activities (Orr, 1996). Complementary research is needed that seeks to uncover how authority functions in more loosely structured collectives that do not have the formal structures for interaction (e.g., interagency meetings), or codified standards of operation (e. g., HRO safety rules). Further, research should examine how the specific communication of individuals, who are *not* members of an official organization, construct and exercise authority that leads to collective action. Lastly, Koschmann and Burk (2016) also called for more research in this area, stating future research, "should explore the notion of authoring and de-authoring authoritative texts across a number of contexts involving collaborative work" (p. 410).

In sum, additional research is needed to explore the mechanisms by which particular agents and texts exercise authority, how this authority manifests in contexts of organizing, and the ongoing consequences for processes of organizing. Much of our knowledge of authority is derived from studies of more traditional and established forms of organization. Less is known about how loosely structured, spontaneous, and ephemeral collectives (e.g., volunteer groups, rapidly mobilized rescue operations, recreation groups, protest groups, etc.) communicatively accomplish authority. In keeping with the conventions of an inductive approach to qualitative inquiry, these specific research

questions emerged from a larger project seeking to understand fluid volunteer collective's activity coordination more broadly:

RQ1: How is authority socially constructed among a fluid volunteer collective?

RQ2: How do authoritative texts serve to discipline members?

METHODS OF CHAPTER 3

The methods of data collection in this particular chapter did not differ from the data collection process described in the methods chapter of this dissertation. However, providing information about the data analysis will help the reader to understand how the findings ultimately emerged from the data.

Following the conventions of an inductive approach to research, I began the study with the broad goal of understanding how communication helps/constrains volunteer actions in this fluid collective. I used procedures in line with grounded theory to code the interview data. Interviews were transcribed into a digital text format and stored in an electronic cloud-based qualitative data management system whereas photos were stored digitally. I conducted line-by-line open coding as a first step. These codes were primarily in-vivo codes or descriptive of what was happening in the scene or conversation. For example, segments of interviews mentioning normative ways of behaving were initially coded as *etiquette* and interviews mentioning the collective's interaction with local government were coded as *city relationships*. A second round of coding further detailed the *etiquette* code by appending the sub codes of *etiquette for riding* and *etiquette for building*. After these first two passes at analyzing the data, the idea of authority emerged as consequential in guiding members' actions and decisions. A third round of focused coding allowed me to concentrate on the communicative interactions that were related to the overarching idea of authority. Throughout the coding process, each code was

"constantly compared" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to other codes to make sure that ideas were grounded within the data and did not overlap. Finally, axial coding allowed for fully fleshing out each theme and determining its relationship to other categories. This step helped to develop the three organizing implications presented in the findings.

As a final validation point, I conducted two additional interviews with dirt jump builders outside of my immediate geographic area. I interviewed a BMX rider and builder in the Southeastern, US and the Western United States. The findings from these interviews were not radically different from the interviews conducted in the Southern US.

FINDINGS OF AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS

Findings are grouped into three overall themes: Emergence of Paradoxical Authoritative Text answers RQ1, Organizing Implications discusses the consequences of this text, Disciplining answers RQ2, and Rewriting discusses how social media can help overcome the ambiguity of the authoritative text. In the first section I explain that *repetitive stories* and *assertives* are two communicative elements that scale up to create an overall *group ethos* that functions as an ambiguous authoritative text. Within the subsection of 'disciplining,' I discuss how a specific form of face-to-face and social media interaction allows for disciplining members to accept the existing group ethos as an authoritative text. This section adds more precision to the communicative elements that scale up to form an authoritative text and discipline members to accept the existing authoritative text. Within the Organizing Implications section, I detail how the ambiguity and paradoxical nature of this group ethos as an authoritative text leads to three challenges to the collective's ability to organize and accomplish collective actions. The Rewriting section details how the dynamic of social media among this collective may allow for rewriting the meaning and trajectory of the authoritative text in a way that could overcome the three

implications/challenges to organizing presented in the prior section. The discussion ties together the findings of all three research questions as well as details the theoretical contributions to authority research.

RQ1: Emergence of Paradoxical Authoritative Text

In this loosely structured volunteer collective, the *group ethos* functions as an authoritative text guiding activity. The group ethos is best summarized by the phrase "no dig, no ride." *No dig, no ride* is a textual abstraction upholding the ethos that if you are going to ride the jumps then you need to help maintain or build the jumps. The original conversations that generated *no dig, no ride* have long vanished as the phrase gained distance over the years. This figurative text becomes concrete when transformed into stickers, hashtags, and other permanent forms. For instance, Figure 3.1 shows a concrete textual representation of *no dig, no ride* at a 18th Street event.

Figure 3.1: Concrete textual representation of the authoritative text ‘no dig, no ride.’

I argue for a *group ethos* as the authoritative text because it is not “unitary” or “monolithic,” rather, this text is a “network of meaning” (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1235) that is subject to a dominant reading. Although my data do not reveal an original conversation that generated *no dig, no ride*, two communicative elements scale up to reinforce the overall group ethos: *repetitive stories,* and to borrow Searle’s (1969, 1985) speech act term, *assertives*.

Scaling Up Repetitive Stories

In reviewing field notes from observation sessions, I noticed that stories and recounting of events were frequently told, retold, and altered. That is, repetitive stories are short anecdotes or scenarios that are repeated and discussed across multiple field sites. These repetitive stories reinforce a group ethos that values contribution to the space. In one story, a BMX rider was ostracized from the Texano and 18th Street jumps based on an event that occurred in January 2015. The Texano builders put up a chain on their trails to prevent people from riding the trails when dry. During a 2017 interview, Mark (all names are pseudonyms) recalled:

> This guy, [name], says 'Well, screw you. I wanna come out here and ride. This isn't your property. You can't chain up the trails.' And they're like, 'Well, screw you. You've never lifted one shovel out here. Who gives you the right to tell us shit?'

Interestingly, other riders were aware of the story, but unaware of the particulars of what happened. In one version of the story the outcasted rider was conducting BMX lessons at the park. Nora recalled:

> There was someone there trying to get in there to teach lessons, which you also need a permit for, and it was just like, 'Hey, man. You didn't dig here. What are you doing trying to teach lessons here on our jumps?'

Nora clarified that ordinarily this likely would not be a problem, but this rider did not contribute or teach the kids how to fix the jumps. In another version of the story, the outcasted rider informed the city about the illegal status of the trails, putting their continued existence into jeopardy.

During one of my observation sessions, I witnessed a rider get into an angry verbal exchange with a remote control (RC) car hobbyist who was driving his small gas-powered remote control (RC) car on freshly surfaced jumps. Not wanting the RC car's wheels to destroy the smooth jump face, or for a bike and RC car to collide, a BMX rider politely

asked the RC driver not to use his car in the park. The RC driver refused, claiming that the jump site was a public park and he could do whatever he liked—which led to an argument. The story of the argument was recounted at the different sites, with the dominant reading that the RC car drivers do not contribute to the jumps and therefore should not be using the space in a destructive manner. In another story two riders got into a fist fight and one threw a bicycle at the other. The particulars of the story are vague, but the conflict started after one rider suggested to another to 'pick up a shovel some time'—insinuating that the rider was not contributing to the jumps.

The common underlying theme of the stories is that the conflicts stemmed from a perceived, or real, lack of contribution (i.e. digging) at the sites. As is the case with distanciation, "the textual outcomes of interaction are inevitably generalized and simplified" (Koschmann & Burk, 2016, p. 398), meaning the specifics of each conflict are less important than the fact that the narratives reinforce the *group ethos* of contribution. One could consider the original 2015 dispute between the ostracized rider and the trail builders as the original "conversation." This conversation generated a "text" that scaled up to the point where it is still referenced in 2018. Interestingly, I have heard these *repetitive stories* at multiple field sites beyond where the initial action occurred.

Scaling Up Assertives

Taylor, et al. (1996) claim that the assertive form of locution "asserts the truth of a state of affairs" and "imposes on the hearer a certain interpretation to which she or he is expected to attend" (p. 21). Across both in-person and online interactions, I witnessed individuals make assertive statements about the nature of their contributions. These assertives discursively position their contributions, not as a simple hobby or pastime, but

as hard work. These assertions come in two forms: assertions at the local site in the form of *work analogies*, and social media hashtags.

For example, during an observation session, members of the collective often joked about submitting time sheets, or joked about having a fictional 'lip license.' A lip is the smooth face of a takeoff jump. Hogan explained, "The term is, 'Do you have a lip license?' This, kind of, the in-joke's like, 'Where's your lip license at?'" In one particular social media post (see Figure 3.2) an individual posted the details of a group workday at the local trails. In this string of interaction, we can see that one rider commented about not needing a 'lip license' whereas another stated "Remember to clock in everybody. I heard were getting paid overtime"—the joke of course being that no one is paid for their labor or required to possess a certification to work on the jumps. Joking about submitting a time sheet, clocking in, and razzing others for not having a 'lip license' likens their volunteer contributions to more structured forms of labor. In further validation of the *repetitive stories* theme, Mark used a *work analogy* assertive in talking about the story of an exiled rider during a one on one interview:

> It's just kind of a kick in the nuts when you're working all the time, and someone shows up, and they're not cool to you…there was the fact of, "Dude, you're using our free volunteer labor to make yourself money, and you're not clocking in, and you're not on the same level."

The above example shows how Mark uses the *work analogy* assertive of being 'clocked in' to illustrate one of the canonical *repetitive stories*. I argue that the *work analogy* assertives are a discursive move meant to characterize their participation and contributions as hard work. Talking about participation in this way reaffirms to members of the group that nothing comes free and it will require tough manual labor to sustain the space.

Social media hashtags are another method to assert the importance of contribution. For example, #digorhavenotrails and #doyouevendig are commonly added to Instagram posts about dirt jump locations. The first hashtag has over 5,000 posts while the latter is used in almost 8,000 posts. These local level interactions may seem inconsequential at first glance. I argue, however, that these small statements reinforce a dominant ideology that equates contribution with hard work. #digorhavenotrails imposes upon the hearer that the privilege of riding dirt jumps does not come free, it requires hard manual labor.

Taken together, the *repetitive stories* and *assertives,* in the form of *work analogies* and hashtags build a *group ethos* of *no dig, no ride* that becomes an authoritative text. Each is recursive in that every time they are mobilized they reinforce the authoritative text. Although interpretations may vary as to what *no dig, no ride* actually means, it can best be summarized as an ethos that values contribution to the collective effort.

No Dig/No Ride as Paradoxical Authoritative Text

This particular authoritative text is both ambiguous and paradoxical. The short pithy nature of this text permits easy scaling up and travel across sites, yet these same characteristics lead to a lot of conflict within the sites. For example, many people had different ideas of what *no dig, no ride* actually stands for. Penn related his interpretation:

> No dig, no ride means you don't just show up at the trails and ride and then take off again. Sweep, clean up a little bit, do something – make an effort. Everybody that's going to the trails, that's doing maintenance on the trails – nobody's getting paid for it. So, for somebody just to show up and just not pitch in somehow is disrespectful.

Penn's version of the authoritative text emphasizes that some form of contribution to the site is preferential. However, the short quip of *no dig, no ride* does not really specify this. As the initial conversations that generated *no dig, no ride* scaled up through the "degrees of separation" (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 24) we can see that "specificity is abandoned

in favor of generality" (p. 26). The authoritative text does not specify that a person should sprinkle a small amount of water onto the jump face, fill a wheelbarrow with fresh soil, spread a light layer of fine dirt particles on the jump face, and then patch up the cracks in the jumps. Instead, the authoritative text simply states that digging in the preferred contribution. Some participants, like Mark, have begun to realize the paradoxical nature of *no dig, no ride*:

> The thing is, I've realized this over the years, and I think everyone else has, too: You don't want everyone digging. The guys that are Dry Guys may be Dry Guys for a reason. They don't know what the fuck they're doing with a shovel.

Mark uses the term "Dry Guy" which will be detailed in the Disciplining section next. Carl also acknowledged how the text may not actually mean that everyone should dig, "That whole BMX trails exploit, of 'no dig, no ride' is more complicated than that, right? Because, they [trail builders] don't actually want *anybody* digging – or everybody digging" [emphasis added]. Patrick also cautioned against having *anyone* dig, "You don't want somebody that definitely doesn't know what they're doing trying to make a jump… there's people that they have no business even working with a broom or shovel."

I consider this a paradoxical authoritative text for two reasons. First, the same thing that makes the authoritative text successful and capable of transcending the local (ambiguity, short pithy nature) can actually lead to conflict within the sites. Second, some of the members' interpretations of *no dig, no ride* are opposite to the words of the text. They do not actually want people to dig on their jumps. This generalized ambiguous authoritative text guides activity in jump sites with differing features, practices of work, and environmental constraints— even if those sites are not amenable to everyone digging. The Organizing Implications section will further explain the consequences of the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of this authoritative text.

RQ2: Disciplining

In Kuhn's (2008) original formulation of authoritative text, he claims that texts discipline by portraying some forms of knowledge or activity as appropriate or desirable and others as inappropriate or undesirable. Authoritative text theorizing needs more precise explanations of *how* the disciplining unfolds in interaction. One of the crucial activities necessary to prolong the life of the dirt jumps is sweeping and watering. As Jared explains, "You don't want to show up and dry ride a spot, which means just riding it dry where there's no water, no moisture. Things are just gonna crumble. Things are just gonna fall apart." Watering the jumps before riding is the ideal, but individuals often rode the spot when it was dry (either intentionally or from lack of knowledge of proper riding etiquette). Chris explained, "if you show up at the trails, and they're cracked and crumbling, and you start riding before sweeping, or watering, that's typically how you get the name 'dry guy.'" The dry guy label is used disparagingly against someone who does not contribute even though he/she knows that they should. As Patrick said, "To me, that's the worst word you can call somebody. They know what it takes but they're doing it, they're hitting up a spot" without watering and sweeping.

The phrase disciplines others by enforcing the *group ethos* of *no dig, no ride*. Taken at face value it may seem as if the 'dry guy' label is a straightforward insult meant to induce behavior change against someone who breaches the social etiquette. However, throughout my observations, interviews, and field notes, I did not encounter specific instances of one person calling another person a dry guy in an attempt to shame or pressure them into contributing. Although behaviors that would be considered as worthy

of earning the nickname ‘dry guy’ often occurred, participants did not directly chastise or confront a person by calling them a dry guy. Occasionally social media posts were shared that threatened (See Figure 3.3) to “openly call you out” on being a dry guy, but based on my field notes and observations, these sorts of interactions did not occur. Instead, the dry guy label is used to setup an abstract figurative, to borrow a term from professional wrestling, “heel” character that everyone in the community could recognize as breaching social norms of the collective. The “heel” character in professional wrestling plays the role of the bad guy or villain in a match, often acting immorally, breaking rules, cheating, employing dirty tactics (e.g. eye pokes), and insulting the audience (Mazer, 1998). In instances where people *were* called a dry guy, the nickname was used in an ironic or humorous way. For instance, one rider might jokingly call another a dry guy for taking a break to ride, even though the two of them just spent several hours digging drainage for the jumps. See, for example, a BMX dry guy variation of a widely circulated meme that was shared within this community (see Figure 3.4). The communicative disciplining to accept the authoritative text does not happen through direct and outright name calling, rather, the figurative ‘dry guy’ label exists as a ‘boogeyman’ type character in the community—always looming as a threatening nickname that one does not want to earn.

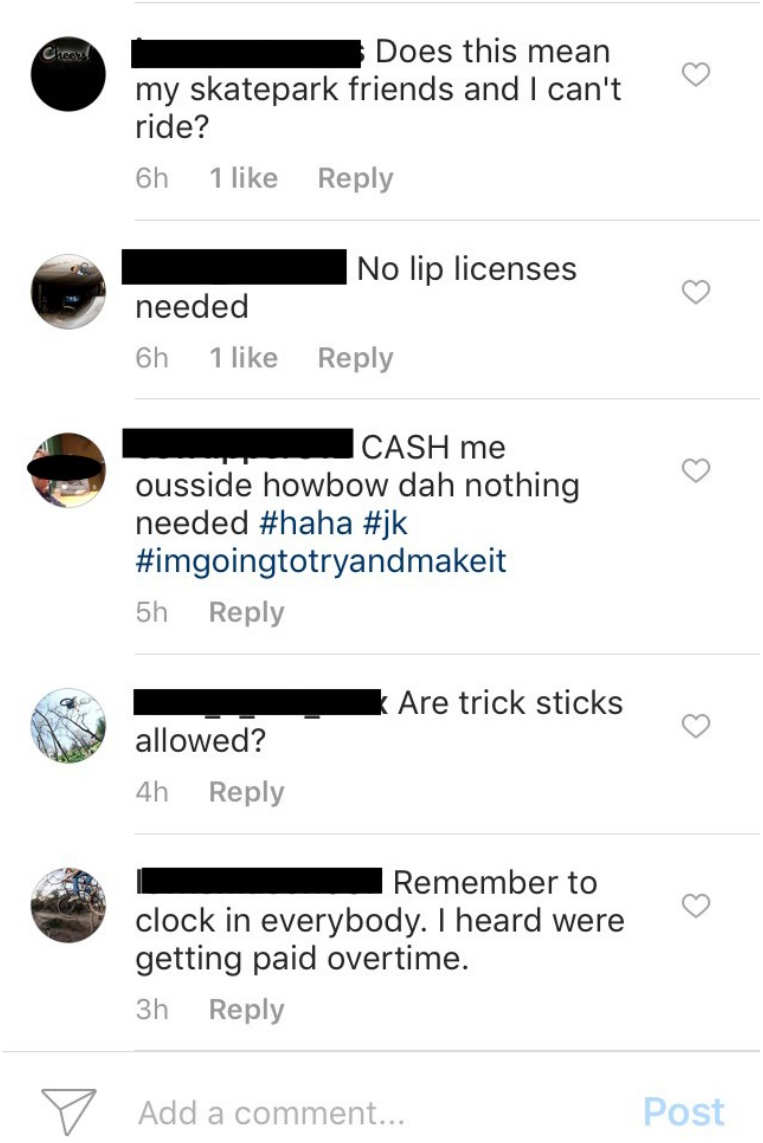

Figure 3.2: Social media *work analogy* assertives.

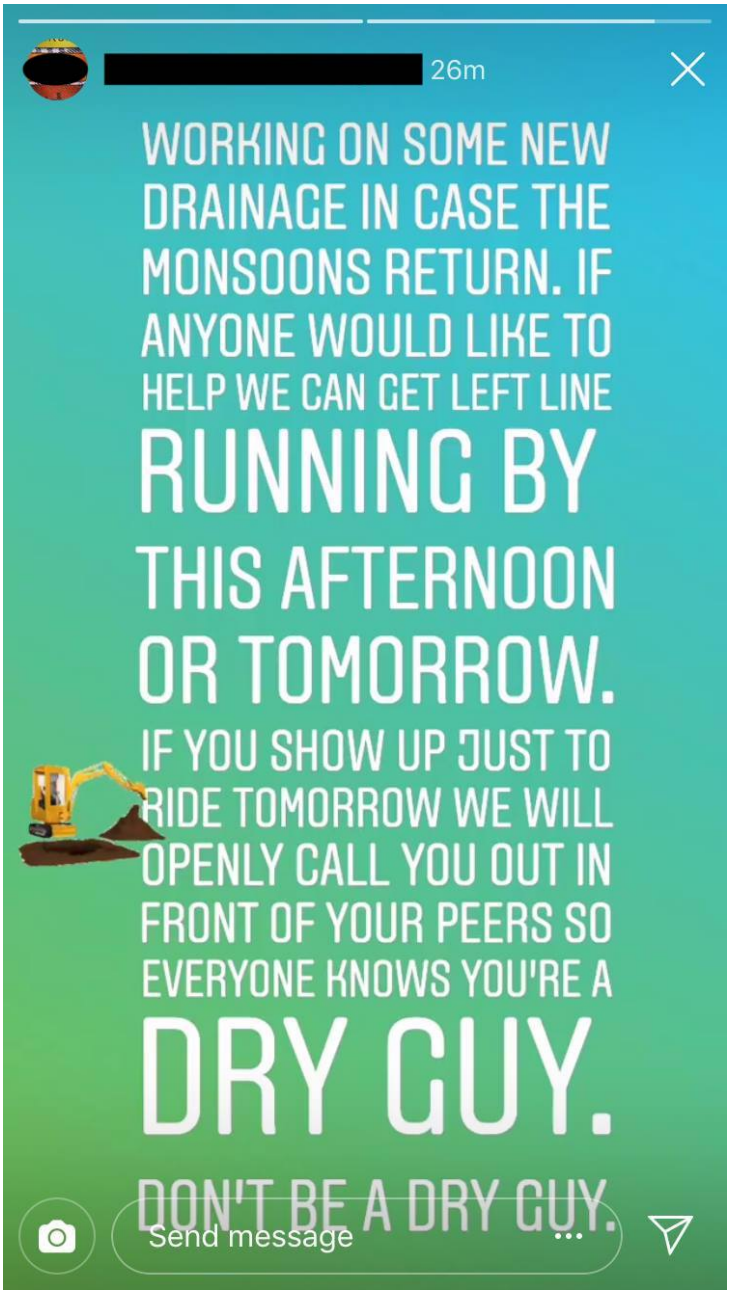

Figure 3.3: Disciplining social media post threatening the ‘dry guy’ nickname

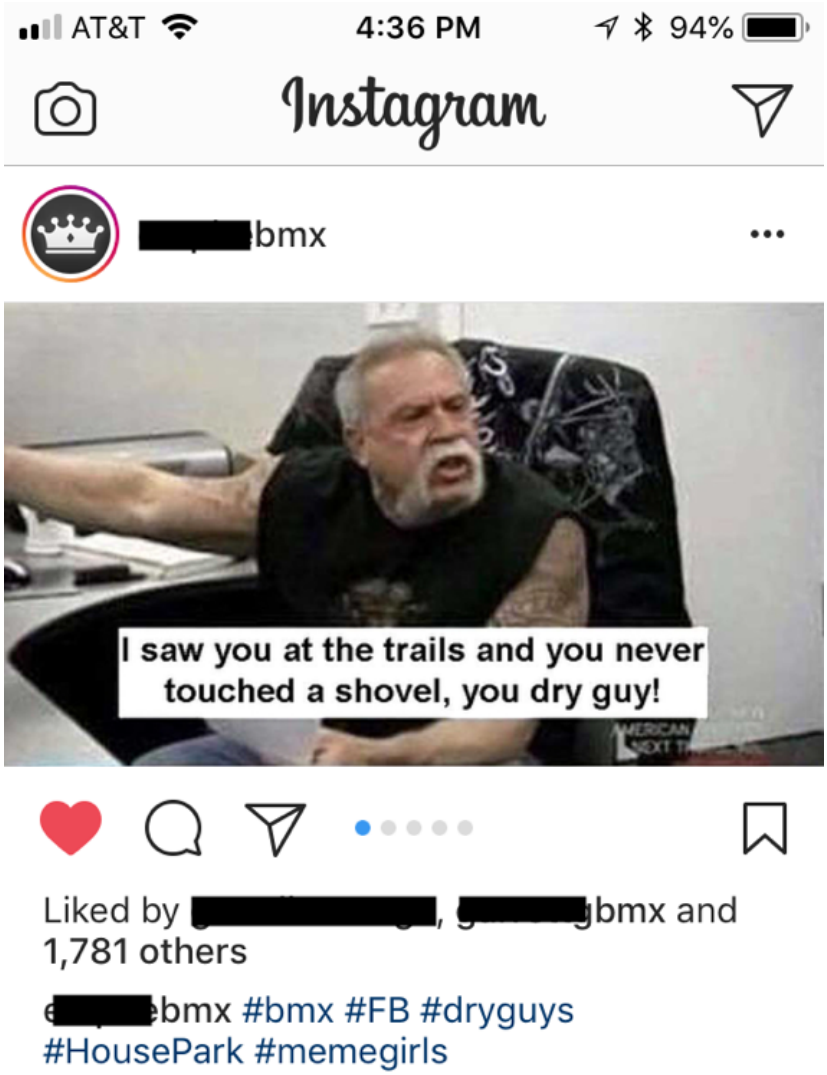

Figure 3.4: Disciplining

Organizing Implications

Implication one: Obligation but not competency

The authoritative text succeeds in obligating people to contribute, but fails to specify the exact nature of how to carry out that contribution. *No dig, no ride* suggests contributing through digging, but does not precisely indicate when, where, or how to dig.

This lack of specificity, combined with the obligation produced by the authoritative text, perpetuates conflict within this site. Individuals who feel obligated to participate, but lack the knowledge of how to dig properly or where to direct their efforts, often end up damaging existing jumps. For instance, many community members reacted negatively after a rider altered the quarter pipe by making it smaller (see Figure 3.5). One rider commented on a photo of the altered jump, stating "if the reason I quit digging at 18th street was a picture." Participants often described building dirt jumps as a science, skill, or craft. Martin felt that building jumps was a developed skill:

> Trail width, and trail transitions, and lips, and just, flowiness – those are all skills that you have to be able to recognize, and be able to build, you kinda have to envision what the trail's gonna look like before you start digging. I think some people are really good at that, and others aren't so good.

In other situations, individuals do possess the knowledge and skills of how to dig, but hold competing ideas over how steep a jump should be or how far apart the jumps should be spaced. Dina recalled, "there might be spats here and there between people, or someone says, 'someone changed this jump and we're gonna change it back!' Sometimes people do stuff that other people aren't too stoked on." Mark commented that often well-intentioned contributions end up disrupting the flow of beginner jumps:

> Usually [beginner jumps], that involves no gaps, and more mellow lips. And, along come somebody, like, 'Man, I'm gonna fix this up!' So, they'll change it into a gap, or something. So, that's your first classic conflict. Or, making a lip really steep, and tall, that people aren't comfortable with.

As Mark specified, one person's idea of "fixing something up" and improving a jump may not align with the greater community's vision. Penn clarified that often times people who contribute are simply trying to help, but lack the skillset to properly contribute: "A lot of times, you'll have the best intentions, but you just end up making more work in the long run. There's a science to doing it [building]." In Figure 3.6 the Instagram handle

for the trails posted a photo of jump lip that was made steeper than normal. The post stated, "don't dig if you don't know what's up." Through the comment chain someone quickly came forward to clarify that they were trying to fix the jump and did not intend to make it steeper. The constant conflict and destruction/reconstruction creates disappointment for some riders, as Martin conveyed:

> I get disappointed sometimes, when I see others – good lines that were built by skilled diggers a few years ago, getting torn down for new stuff. That's okay. I think, if it's properly vetted, through all the riders there. But, I definitely see it happening – I definitely see good lines being torn down, and replaced with lines that aren't so good.

Although the authoritative text of *no dig, no ride* obligates participants to contribute, it is not specific enough to spell out exactly how one should contribute. As a result, individuals often contribute at sporadic times, alter existing jumps in undesirable ways, and build jumps without being in tune with what other builders are trying to achieve. In other words, the ambiguity and paradoxical nature of the authoritative text reinforces and perpetuates conflict within the space.

Implication two: Energizing the base

Borrowing a term from the arena of politics, "energizing the base" typically refers to a politician's ability to instill fervor and zeal into the already committed members of a political party—as opposed to persuading new individuals to join the party. The authoritative text is only reaching the people who *already* know how to carry out activities in the space. The authoritative text "energizes the base" of committed participants. As Hogan claimed, "most of the people that spend any time at some trails, you figure them out, you've already got that general sense of, 'Alright, keep the place clean. Work on this when it needs it.'" One participant commented that much of the destruction of the site is caused by people who do not know the group ethos, "like, people that don't know, just kids

that always ride through the mud that don't know better. They think they're having fun, but they're really just getting us to work later."

In 2018, electric rental scooters and electric-assist bicycles gained prominence in Appleton as an alternate mode of transportation. Participants at 18th street frequently bemoaned the fact that tourists on scooters and electric bicycles would ride on the jumps when they were too wet, causing ruts and damaging the track (see Figure 3.7). Social media interactions are a main communicative site of the scaling up process for the *no dig/no ride* authoritative text. As my informal observations revealed, many of the visitors who pass through the jump site, whether parents of small children or electric scooter riders, are unaware of the existence of the group, and as a result, unaware of the *no dig, no ride* group ethos. That is, the individuals who would benefit most by learning of and abiding by the authoritative text are unaware of the social media presence of the group, and not part of the in person interactions that perpetuate the authoritative text. In essence, the authoritative text is caught in an echo chamber, energizing the base of participants who are already committed to making contributions to the space while failing to reach newcomers and individuals who damage the jumps (e.g. electric scooter riders).

Figure 3.5: Conflicts perpetuated by ambiguous authoritative text

The comment chain of Figure 3.5 states, “Everyone quits 18th cause anyone can have control- fun place.. bad digging.”

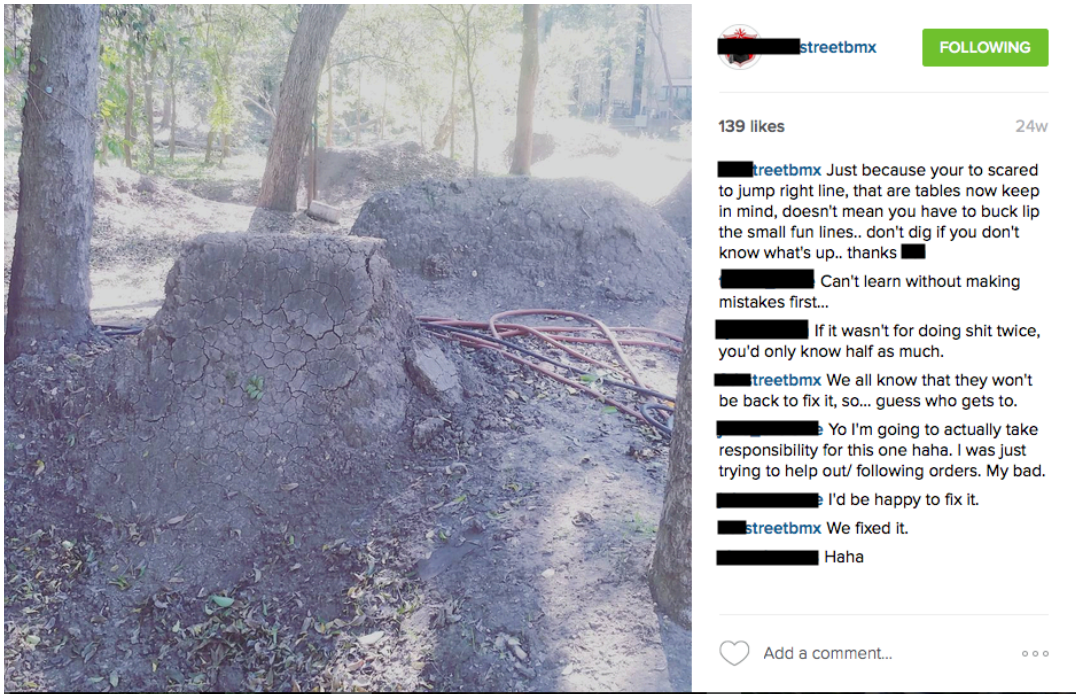

Figure 3.6: Conflicts perpetuated through digging

Figure 3.7: Ruts on a fresh track

Implication three: Perfect participation impedes participation

An unintended consequence of this ambiguous authoritative text is that it instills in some members a feeling that they must contribute fully or not participate at all. Leon has two small children, a full time job, and recently started his own dirt jump spot close to his house. When discussing his trips to other dirt jumps, he recalled:

> A few times, I've wanted to go ride somewhere and I feel like – I mentioned my limited schedule—I kind of feel that if I don't go and put time in digging, I feel guilty going to ride because I kind of feel like I'm not pulling my weight.

As a result, Leon often did not visit dirt jump locations unless he had a few hours to spend digging at the site. Even though a mere ten minutes of digging and 20 minutes of riding would be a beneficial contribution to the space, he often chose not to venture to other dirt jumps because he could not commit to full participation. Patrick reflected on the group ethos of the Tejano jumps, "I think that might be a bad… but I think a lot of people get that in their mind [no dig/no ride] and they're like – it makes them nervous to even come out here." The consequence of this authoritative text is that it holds up perfect participation as the singular ideal, while not allowing for smaller sporadic contributions.

Rewriting to Overcome Ambiguity

Kuhn (2008) clarifies that texts are protean because "they receive supplements from other texts encountered and appended in practice" (p. 1238). Within this context, online communication is one of the main mechanisms where agents rewrite and append texts. The primary online communication channels for this collective are Instagram and Facebook. Whereas a traditional organization may have closed door meetings, or a company intranet, this collective uses social media to discuss activities. The public nature of the conversations allows many individuals to vie for influence of the authoritative text. For instance, an Instagram post by @18thstreetbmx promoted the sale of logo stickers with the caveat that financial proceeds from the sticker sales would benefit the trails. Within the comment chain, members of the collective attempted to work out what "counts" as legitimate participation and contribution in line with the group ethos (see Figure 3.8). One rider commented, "it's funny how people think they can support jumps with a T shirt instead of actually digging." The banter between posters in subsequent comments concerned whether

or not purchasing items for the trails counts as legitimate participation, with one commenter saying, “Every little bit helps. I won’t complain when a new shovel or rake or watering can shows up due to a little side money being made.”

In late 2017 a national television program produced an online video segment of a few mountain bike and BMX professional riders jumping at the 18th Street location. Some of the online interactions about the video concerned whether or not these professional riders contributed to the location. One 18th Street rider posted a Facebook comment on the video (see Figure 3.9): “I’m sure it’s easy to get caught up in the glamour world and just expect ppl to dig/prep trails for them.” Although this volunteer was upset about the professional riders filming a segment at the trails, Hogan held a different viewpoint: “If you don’t realize that’s his [the professional rider] job in the industry, then you’re missing it, right? He’s the guy that’s making BMX look amazing for the next generation of kids. He’s doing his part.”

As this example illustrates, the actual meaning of *no dig, no ride* is contested. In other words, the coorientation system consists of Hogan drawing on the text of *no dig, no ride*, to rewrite his version of what the authoritative text should be. The participants must interact to rewrite what the text means. Other interviewees mentioned the ethos as at least bringing beer or beverages to the trail, “Bring a double [a type of bike] and a 12 pack, and you’ll get to know people pretty quick and they’ll give you respect. Don’t show up empty handed and just start riding. That’s the worst thing you could do.”

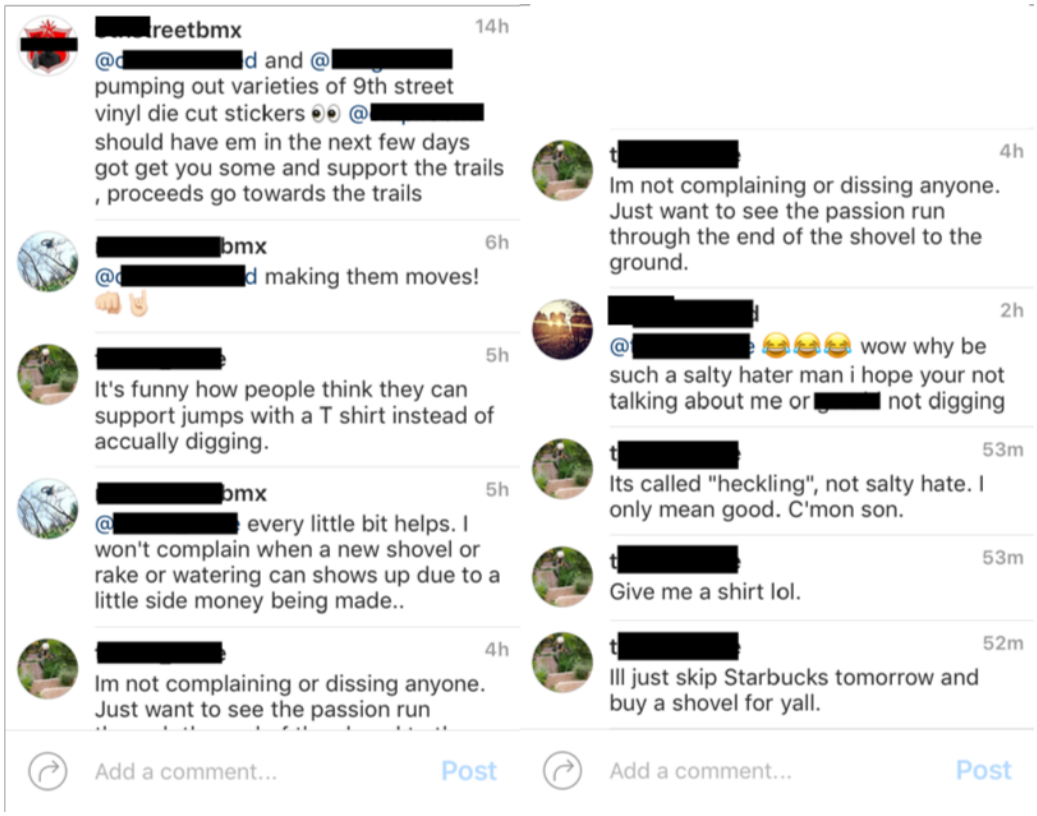

Figure 3.8: Rewriting of authoritative texts via social media.

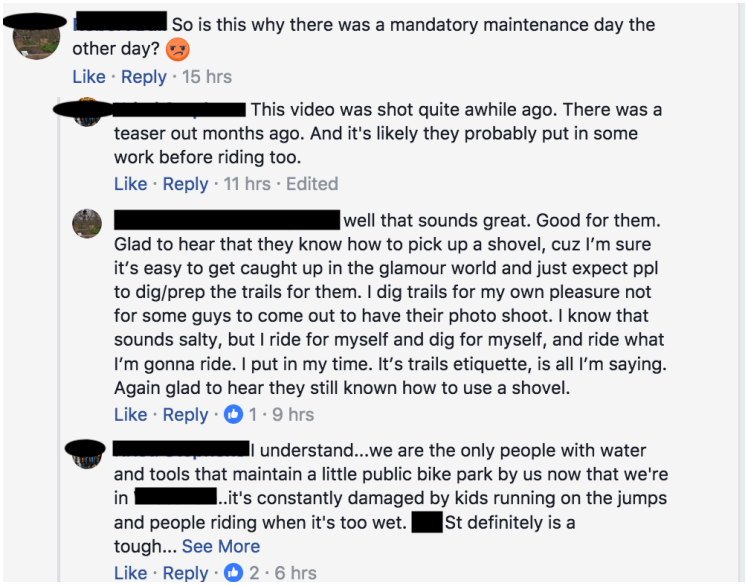

Figure 3.9: Rewriting of authoritative text via social media.

DISCUSSION OF AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS

The idea that stories contribute to an authoritative text bears semblance to research on narrative, particularly in relation to their repeated nature. Bormann (1972) noted that individuals can "chain out," or build upon and repeat stories, into a group fantasy, while Boje (1991) found that employees repeatedly perform stories. Further, Dailey and Browning (2014) theorized "narrative repetition" as a method for tracking the shifting meaning of stories in organizations over time . Bruner (1991) claims that in order for a narrative to be worth telling it must concern how "an implicit canonical script has been breached" (p. 11). In this case, the "canonical script" is the authoritative text of *no dig, no ride*. However, the interesting finding here is that a dominant reading of the events of the story emerged, despite several members of the collective lacking clear factual details about the story. In other words, in fluid volunteer collectives the particular details of a story may not always impact a story's ability to scale up to the level of authoritative text.

Findings from this study also resemble the well-established organizational phenomenon of "concertive control" (Barker, 1993). Concertive control is a process of identifying with the broader organization's mission to the extent that members become self-disciplining. While some of the concepts presented here, such as creating obligation and energizing the base, are undoubtedly similar to concertive control in a few ways, this study did not extensively question or theorize individual identification processes.

The fluid nature of this volunteer collective complicates some of our understanding of authority and collective actions. First, prior research suggests that a deficient authoritative text can be "de-authored" (Koschmann & Burk, 2016, p. 410), by linking the text back to the original circumstances that created it, or by continually associating the text with another physical location. In other words, undoing the "vanishing act" by revealing the original authorship of the text, or linking the text to a different time and place will de-

legitimize the authority of the text. The findings of this study suggest that it may not be possible to "de-author" the authoritative text of *no dig, no ride* because the original conversations are impossible to track down. I argue that instead of de-authoring, members of the collective engage in rewriting and appending of the text—often through social media. However, Kocshmann and Burk's idea of continually linking an authoritative text to a specific location as a way to de-author a text may hold promise for volunteer groups. As members of the collective construct new dirt jump spaces, they may be able to associate the ambiguous authoritative text of *no dig, no ride* with other dysfunctional locations and craft their own authoritative text as they see fit.

Second, drawing on ideas from Greimas (1987) and Searle (1969), Taylor et al., (1996) explain that a state of affairs will exist in "potentiality" (p. 18), or a virtual state of existence, until a competent agent is directed to fulfill a task that will bring the uncertain state into actuality. Here competence is understood as "desire, obligation, knowledge, or skill to carry out the act" (p. 18). For example, a university Dean may direct an Administrative Assistant to finalize the yearly budget. The completed budget exists in potentiality until the interaction triggers the Administrative Assistant to complete the task. As a paid employee of the university the Administrative Assistant likely possesses the knowledge and skill (i.e., competencies) to complete the task, however the Dean's request triggers the Administrative Assistant's *willingness* or *intention*. The new finding of this research is that, in informal collectives, it may not be as simple as triggering willingness and intention if the possible contributor does not possess the knowledge or skill for *how* to craft a dirt jump. For example, Nora claimed, "Not everyone that knows how to fix a jump is gonna be around when these kids show up that don't have the experience or know what to do." Because there is no employer/employee contract, one cannot assume that interested

parties are competent members. In other words, attempts at communicatively enacting authority in fluid collectives may be more challenging than in formal organizations.

When specificity is abandoned in favor of generality, it also may not allow for newcomers to be easily absorbed into the collective. Because the authoritative text is not readily apparent to newcomers, and because the authoritative text does not provide specific enough guidelines, newcomers might struggle to find a way to meaningfully contribute to the collective efforts. Furthermore, as Consequences for Organizing detailed, the authoritative text does not reach the people who most need to abide by it. Along similar lines, Cooren (2004) cautions that texts can sever themselves from their original circumstances and "act" in unanticipated ways. The authoritative text of *no dig, no ride* could have the unintended effect of making newcomers feel unwelcome in the space and creating a sense of obligation that prevents committed individuals from making smaller contributions.

Other unintended effects of the paradoxical authoritative text lie in creating a recursive loop of conflict. The authoritative text creates an obligating feeling of needing to contribute, but does not specify how, when, or where to contribute. Due to the fluidity of this collective, even the seasoned participants who are experienced dirt jump builders may accidentally perpetuate conflict within this space. For instance, considering the dispersed times of participation, it may be hard for disparate participants to achieve an overall collective accomplishment. If rider A starts building a jump on a Monday morning, but rider B shows up separately on a Tuesday, rider B might complete the jump in a manner that A did not intend. These separate times of participation are inherent to this type of fluid collective. The authoritative text plays a role in the recursion of this conflict because individuals feel obligated to contribute—even though that contribution can often lead to conflict.

This study also surfaces the idea that, at least for loosely structured volunteer collectives, official organizing may only be a small part of the equation. While a nonprofit operating as '18th Street BMX' helps the group interact with the city, it is the localized day-to-day interactions guided by authoritative texts that generally maintain the jumps.

At a more general theoretical level, this study succeeds by showing how a text distanciates and travels from local sites to more broader sites. While prior case study research has generated fruitful examples of the construction and rewriting of authoritative texts that operate within a singular organization, this study provides an example of an authoritative text that transcends a singular site. For instance, Koschmann and Burk (2016) found that the "wild wild west" authoritative text structured how scientists coordinated with one another in lab spaces. While *no dig, no ride* may seem similar to the authoritative text of "wild wild west" the primary difference between the two is that *no dig, no ride* scales up and transcends the local. The authoritative text in this study guided actions within all three dirt jump locations, and as my two final validation interviews confirmed, the larger dirt jump community. This lends empirical support to the value of authoritative texts for large scale collective organizing—if the ambiguity of the text can be overcome.

The findings also make explicit how authoritative texts discipline. Kuhn (2008) claims that authoritative texts discipline by portraying certain actions or knowledge as "(in)appropriate and (un)desirable" (p. 1236). Most studies of authoritative texts treat discipline as an implicit part of authoritative texts without unpacking the communicative elements that play a role in that disciplining. This study showed how face-to-face interactions and social media communications serve to either rewrite the authoritative text or discipline others to accept the existing text. It is not that the authoritative text itself disciplines, rather, the threat of becoming the heel character in the community disciplines people to abide by the group ethos. In the coorientation perspective, a delimited number of

people have access to the original conversation that generates a text. In this study, social media allowed a range of people to vie for influence during the rewriting of a text. The finding that social media interactions open up the process of scaling and distanciation echoes recent research on the ability of Twitter hashtags to constitute an organization. Albu and Etter (2016) found that the hashtag "permits nonorganizational members to extract it from its original context and reconfigure it in multiple and undetermined ways" (p. 26). The hashtags "disturb notions of authorship" (p. 26) in that the original author does not maintain complete control over what the hashtag means or how it will ultimately be used to constitute an organization. Instead of focusing on how hashtags and online commentary constitute an organization, the present study has shown how specific forms of online communications allow for a breadth of people to rewrite or re-affirm the meaning and value of an authoritative text within a fluid social collective. Future research should continue to explore the way social media interactions contribute to, not on the communicative sustainment of organizing, but the creation and trajectory of authoritative texts.

A unique aspect of this research is that it tracks the development of an authoritative text over an extended period of time. For instance, my observations span almost 5 years—enough time to witness the unfolding of particular stories and their eventual scaling up to reinforce the authoritative text. While studying the development of authoritative texts over time is important, it is worth considering the minimum length of time is necessary for an authoritative text to emerge. For example, in time critical situations where disparate citizens come together to coordinate activity (e. g., rescue operations, widespread natural disaster response) will authoritative texts emerge to help them coordinate? It is likely that if an authoritative text does emerge it is unlikely to scale all the way up to the sixth degree of separation given the rapidly formed and short-lived nature of this form of collective organizing. Although the texts may not reach the higher degrees of separation, it is still

worth studying the initial emergence of the texts—especially considering other forms of control are lacking in those emergent events.

It is also important to bear in mind that while there are multiple sources of authority within a given social context, this article is exploring the *textual* form of authority. Although the CCO perspective tends to stray away from viewing authority as vested solely within the agent, certain individuals in this social scene exhibit more authority than others. This is not arguing that the authority is *solely* within the person, rather future work could tease out how authority is shared between various agents, be they material, human, or nonhuman.

Chapter 4: Tracing Organizationality Through Materiality: The Pure Natural and (Re)Natural in Communicatively Constituting a Fluid Social Collective

The field of organizational research has witnessed a growth in scholarship subscribing to the baseline premise that communication is constitutive of organizing (e.g., Boivin, Brummans, & Barker, 2017; Cooren, 2006; 2010; McPhee & Zaug, 2009; Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). In the CCO perspective, organizations are not contexts where communication takes place, but rather organizations are made manifest through communicative action and interaction (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). This line of thinking differs from the "container metaphor" (Axley, 1984), or transmission model (Craig, 1999) that treats communication as one of many variables occurring *within* an established organization. At least three main CCO approaches can be identified, and while variations exist among these schools of thought, each approach shares the premise that communication is the lifeblood of organization. A key theoretical endeavor of the CCO approach lies in questioning the emergence of organizational phenomena. In reviewing how CCO scholars view the ontological status of organization, Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman (2018) clarify that CCO scholarship tends to take an organization (a noun or entity), organizing (as processual), and "organizationality" (adjective) approach to the relationship between communication and organization. The "organizationality" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schoeneborn et al., 2018) approach considers the communication/organization relationship not as a binary of forming organization vs. non-organization, but rather as accomplishing degrees of organizationalness.

A strength of the organizationality framework lies in allowing for theorizing unconventional loose, fluid, and precarious social formations. Organizational studies

primarily seek to explain processes and actions within "formal organizations" (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016) where white-collar workers and work are "representative and standard" (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Scholars have called for more research on the "white spaces" (O'Doherty et al., 2010), such as non-places (parking lots, waiting areas, etc.), forgotten and abandoned sites, and novel undertheorized locations that exist between the spaces of traditional organizations in order to "defamiliarize organizational theory" (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015, p. 589). The organizationality framework, and CCO approaches more broadly, accept a "low-threshold" (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017) concept of organization, which makes the approach well suited to begin building theoretical knowledge into alternate forms of social collective phenomena.

In this study, I view fluid social collectives as a site for studying the intersection of materiality and different degrees of organizationality. Fluid collectives could include community gardens, public art installations, hiking trails, natural areas, community 'free boxes,' or communal meeting areas, that are constructed and maintained through fleeting and improvisational actions of individuals. A distinct aspect of all of these collectives is that they are materially accessible; that is, they lack the secure borders, formal barriers, or restrictions on entry commonly present with formal organizational settings (e.g. office buildings, factories, bases). Fluid social collectives occupy a space that is more connected to the natural environment, and as such present minimal barriers to entry regarding potential participation at these sites. The borders of these forms of fluid organizing are less defined, but can be viewed as enmeshed in, and constituted by, a world of people, objects, materials, and natural forces.

The organizationality framework theorizes that the natural material environment plays a potentially powerful role in the ways organizing is constituted in social settings, yet the particular ways this materiality contributes to different forms of organizationality

is not clear. Studies that *have* problematized nature, tend to approach the subject as one of organizational impacts on the environment, or the reverse, environmental effects to the organization. However, these studies largely treat the natural environment as separate from the processes of organizing – as an independent or dependent variable – and not directly implicated in the constitutive process of achieving organizationality. The Montreal School (MS) of CCO thinking is particularly useful to investigate nature as it considers materiality as residing among a "plenum of agencies" (Cooren, 2006, 2010, 2012) that communicatively constitute organization. This approach recognizes inert forms of materiality as active agents capable of contributing to organizing processes. This is consistent with calls for a clearer conceptualization of the agency of nature without resorting to dualisms of simply human/nonhuman (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). An *organizationality* approach demands more thorough engagement with materiality and nature and a more precise way of discussing nature among the varied forms of materiality. To that end, I employ tenets of MS to investigate how the agency of the natural material environment, along with all manner of materiality, plays a role in accomplishing organizationality.

This research examines loosely structured and ephemeral groups of bicycle motocross (BMX) riders who build and maintain a dirt jump course within a public park in an urban area. This fluid collective lacks many of the hallmarks of more traditional organizations, such as defined leadership, hierarchy, official communication channels, membership, logos, etc. This work began with a broad interest in how individuals in this fluid context interact to achieve collective outcomes. As the research progressed, the topic of the natural material environment emerged as an important factor and I pursued more targeted examination of how these materials contribute to organizationality. The article contributes to organizational theory and CCO lines of thinking first by providing the *pure*

natural and *(re)natural* as a way of discussing materiality and nature among a relationship of agencies. The article then explains how the pure natural accomplishes organizationality through interconnecting seemingly disparate decisions, regulating actions, and contributing to organizational identity.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Constitutive Viewpoints and Organizationality

A shared assumption across CCO schools of thought is that communication processes are the lifeblood that create or constitute organization rather than being a mere variable that occurs *within* the "container" (Axley, 1984) of organizations. This approach adopts a "grounded-in-action" (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) perspective wherein organizations emerge from an ongoing flow of social interaction among actors and objects. There are at least three CCO schools of thought, each with their own strengths covering inductive and deductive approaches. However, I do not situate this study in solely one school of thought. Instead, I adopt a theoretical position of communication constitutes as a baseline premise, but draw upon specific tenets from the Montreal School variant of CCO theory (Cooren, 2006, 2010, 2012; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000) in order to investigate the achievement of organizationality. In particular, MS pays special attention to materiality and the variety of hybrid agents, human or nonhuman, that contribute to the constitution of organization. In short, CCO offers a theoretical apparatus that can be easily extended to capture nature. For now, I will focus on the common links between CCO as a baseline premise.

The CCO perspective centers around the question of 'What is an organization?' (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). In answering this question, Schoeneborn et al. (2018) clarify that CCO scholarship tends to cluster around three theoretical orientations:

organization, *organizing*, and *organizationality*. Schoeneborn et al., (2018) explore the theoretical tensions between communication as an explanatory process and the explanandum, or object of explanation. All three views share a commitment to communication as an explanatory mechanism; however, the approaches differ in the *object* of what it is they are explaining. In other words, scholars from each approach might pose the question: 'does communication explain an organization (noun), organizing (verb, processual view), or organizationality (adjective, the attributes or degree of being organized)? The first view, or the "verb-noun tension" (p. 7) focuses on communicating as a verb and organization as a distinct thing, or noun. Organization is both process and entity in this view. The second view, or the "verb-verb" tension, focuses on how ongoing flows of interactions and practices sustain organizing in the verb form. The third view, and the one most appropriate for this study, is the organizationality approach.

The organizationality approach (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schoeneborn, et al., 2018) maintains that being organized is not a binary question of whether the collective outcome of communicative events qualifies as an organization or not, rather, the question is one of *degree* of organizationness. The framework builds upon Ahrne and Brunsson's (2011) idea of the decisional basis of organizing to suggest that three characteristics play a role in accomplishing organizationality: (1) interconnected decision making, (2) actorhood, and (3) identity. Taken together, these three criteria are the necessary characteristics to achieve degrees of organizationality. One cannot reduce organizationality to only one of the criteria. For example, a group of friends helping each other move residences likely makes interconnected decisions (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009), but they do not form an organizational entity because they do not achieve actorhood, or organizational identity. The characteristic of actorhood distinguishes organizations from other forms of collective

behavior, such as markets and communities. For actorhood to be achieved, the social collective must be "attributed" as capable of acting by external others. In other words, the social entity must be identifiable and addressable by others as able to act. In order to address a social collective as an actor, the collective needs an identity.

Moving beyond MS theorizing, Dobusch and Schoeneborn (2015) draw upon McPhee and Zaug's (2009) approach to CCO to argue for the importance of membership negotiation and boundary demarcating in constituting organizationality. In their view, identity plays a pivotal role in a fluid social collective's ability to achieve organizationality, because these precarious forms of social behavior typically lack formal membership and hierarchical structures. As they state, "the preparation and performance of the identity claim itself carry greater weight than in less fluid settings" (p. 1029). In conventional institutionalized settings words have binding force because of the expectations and conventions of the social setting (e.g., a judge issuing a warrant). In settings without institutionalized norms and expectations, such as fluid social collectives, the authors explain that individuals making identity claims ground them in materiality (artifacts, well-established communication channels, events) so that the claim can be validated and affirmed (p. 1014). Without those expectations, fluid social collectives must engage in a constant communicative negotiation of what the organization *is* and what it *is not* (i.e., identity claims; p. 1010).

Empirical studies applying an organizationality framework demonstrate its usefulness in addressing constitutive processes in non-traditional organizational settings. For example, Schoeneborn et al. (2018) studied the hacker activist collective "Anonymous" and concluded through media articles, press reports, twitter conversations, and interviews of members and journalists that the ongoing, active communication of members demonstrated organizationality. Similarly, Wilhoit and Kisselburgh's (2015) study

demonstrated how bicycle commuters' actions demonstrate traces of organizationality. Given the potentially tenuous and precarious nature of fluid collectives there is a need to continue study of "different empirical cases in a range of fluid settings where organizationality is at stake" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 1031).

Constitutive Viewpoints, Materiality, and Agency

In what has become denoted as the "material turn" (Vásquez & Plourde, 2017), "post-dualistic" (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009), "non-dualist" (Novak, 2016), or "post-social" (Contractor, Monge, & Leonardi, 2011; Humphries & Smith, 2014) thinking, scholars suggest that the material is not simply symbolic, rather, materials also have agency. The post-social turn asks that researchers "de-centre the human actor from the heart of analysis and to recognize the constitutive influence of non-human actors, including technologies and material objects" (Humphries & Smith, 2014, p. 478).

In addition to grappling with the ontological status of organization, CCO scholarship, and MS in particular, engages the question, 'What agents are capable of acting on behalf of an organization?' In answering this question, MS scholars emphasize the agential role of materiality in communicative events. Achieving organization relies on contributions from texts, artifacts, machines, and humans (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008). Building upon Garfinkel (1988), Cooren (2006, 2010, 2012) considers organizations as a "plenum of agencies," which suggests that organizations are comprised by a variety of human and nonhuman actors. Making a collective present occurs through both the nonhuman, such as texts (logos, by-laws, memos, charts, brochures), spatial elements (buildings, gardens, fences, offices), artifacts (computers, robots, furniture), and humans (workers, CEOs, volunteers; Cooren, 2006, p. 92). Materiality is not simply equated with the tactile dimension—that which can be touched – but also can encompass emotions,

ideas, visions, or knowledge. In order for something to exist it needs to be materialized through a communicative relationship (Cooren, 2018). That is, a "relational ontology" (Cooren, 2015) maintains that materialization happens through relationships. A belief is materialized *through* the relationship of words that express it. In the relational view, communication is not reduced to the ability of humans, rather, communication is about holding two things together in a relationship through a third being (see Cooren, 2015, 2018 for overview). This viewpoint does not consider humans as an absolute source or starting point for communication.

MS seeks to explain how values, principles, rules, policies, ideologies, emotions, attitudes—and even organization—are made present and relevant in interaction. For instance, a protocol is *ventriloquized* when the CEO refers to the policies listed in the protocol as a basis for a decision. The protocol is *incarnated*, or given a body, by the CEO who mobilizes it in conversation. The protocol could have an immaterial dimension or "spirit" that is negotiated in interaction (e. g., the spirit and letter of the law). This ontology accepts the immaterial as capable of mattering in ongoing organizing processes. In summarizing the CCO approach, Cooren and Fairhurst (2008) state, "if the idea of the communicative constitution of organization makes any sense, it is for us on the sole condition that the concept of 'communication' is extended to what non-humans do" (p. 142).

Beyond CCO schools of thought, most of the research into materiality can be described in two ways: a focus on the human created or manipulated forms of materiality, and a focus on communicative artifacts of materiality. For instance, studies of architecture and space (Dale & Burrell, 2008; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007), technologies (Leonardi, 2012), and other objects (Kuhn & Rennstam, 2016) share a focus on human-created materiality, or forms of materiality crafted by humans for specific purposes. Further, studies examining

the importance of materiality in processes of organizing largely focus on objects and artifacts traditionally utilized for communication (e.g. signs, documents, policies, software). In one interesting departure, Hirst and Humphreys (2013) theorize sewage smells, temperature, and lack of natural light as an immaterial form having agency within an industrial work site. These agents were not designed and implemented by organizational actors, they were simply features of the site. Despite a wealth of studies situating materiality in the ongoing process of organizing, few studies engage in explanations of one particular form of materiality—the natural material environment. Noting this absence, Vásquez and Plourde (2017) called on scholars to explore environmental elements such as temperature, climate, and the ground.

Organizational studies literature, and materiality studies more broadly, is replete with investigations of nonhuman agency (Castor & Cooren, 2006; Cooren, 2009). However, with only a handful of exceptions (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013; Hirst & Humphreys, 2013), the *natural* material environment is rarely implicated directly in research. By focusing heavily on certain types of materials (e.g. technologies, software, buildings), we are missing an explanation of how the *natural* material environment plays a role in the organizationality of social collectives. A focus on the natural side of materiality will also move the field beyond studies of inherently *communicative* artifacts (e.g. memos, signs, texts) and human created forms of materiality. Lastly, scholars have noted that the subject of agency itself struggles to incorporate agents outside the realm of human/nonhuman such as climate, earth, and sky. Schoeneborn & Vásquez (2017) even call for an alternative tool for naming and understanding the active contributions of humans, objects, and collectives without resorting to binary explanations (p. 13). To test the extent to which organizationality is present in fluid social collectives it is critical to treat the natural environment as a potential agent in the constitution of organization.

This study is part of a larger research project that takes a broad interest in understanding how individuals coordinate actions to sustain a volunteer built bicycle dirt jump park. In keeping with the conventions of an inductive approach to qualitative inquiry, the topic of natural materiality emerged after sustained engagement with the field site. The following research question was not determined prior to entering the field. Rather, this research question emerged through an iterative process of data collection and analysis:

> RQ: What is the role of materiality and nature in contributing to the organizationality of a fluid social collective?

METHODS OF CHAPTER 4

The methods of data collection in this particular chapter are described in the larger methods chapter of this dissertation. Following an inductive approach to research, the project began with informal observations in the Fall of 2015 with a general interest in how the BMX bicyclists construct the jumps. The specific focus on the natural environment and CCO theory emerged after cycling between collected data and extant literature. This study relies on data from two primary sources: ethnographic field observations at the site and interviews with BMX riders. The use of multiple data sources over time aided in the reliability of data by allowing me to recognize consistent patterns across actors, events, and action. This approach sought to respond to criticism that prior CCO scholarship could be limited by a heavy reliance on conversation analysis as a method (Blaschke, Schoeneborn, & Seidl, 2012). However, in this chapter I primarily focus on the 18th Street Dirt Jumps as a field site.

Site of Study

The 18th Street Dirt Jumps (all names and locations are pseudonyms) sit on a small patch of public park land next to the flood plain of nearby creek in 'Appleton,' a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. Dirt jumps are piles of dirt sculpted with a takeoff and landing ramp allowing BMX bicyclists to jump or perform tricks. The jumps were hand built by riders in the early 1990s without the city's approval. The tasks of constructing and maintaining the site is carried out solely by the BMX riders that use the park. Building of new jumps often requires either digging up fresh dirt and filtering out the rocks, or tearing down an existing jump and reworking it into a new form. Maintenance of the jumps is an ongoing process that includes, sweeping fine particles of dirt into the cracks of the jump, packing the fresh dirt down, trimming overgrown plants, and watering the course so the dirt does not harden, crack, and eventually crumble away. As the findings will reveal, there is no central leadership or organization in charge of this process. There are no boundaries to entering this site meaning anyone could contribute to or destroy the jumps. There are no official channels of communication or lists of members for this group of people.

Data Analysis

I followed the tenets of Charmaz' (2000) constructivist approach to grounded theory in that data analysis and collection occurred simultaneously. I moved back and forth between open coding and reviewing extant literature as an initial step for analyzing the data. Initial open codes categorized the topics of particular interview sections. For example, the sample codes of *vision for the space*, *city relationships*, *building jumps*, *deciding what to build, uniqueness of location, nostalgia,* and *challenges* labeled portions of the conversation related to those topics. I then returned to the data for another round of initial

coding—an emergent process wherein I compared newly coded data with coded segments of text from the first round. This step led to creating new codes with greater specificity. For instance, the *deciding what to build* code was further clarified with a *decision through trial and error* code. In reviewing the initial rounds of codes, I noticed that the environment itself, as well as weather events, were frequently mentioned in relation what the participants were able, and unable, to accomplish. As the specific topic of the natural environment and use of objects began to emerge, I pursued more targeted inquiry around the topic. I then returned to my field notes with an eye toward observations that included notes about objects, materials, and nature as well as utilized "focused coding" (Charmaz, 2014) to problematize natural materiality. This step generated codes such as *location*, *trees*, *flooding*, and *environment* and *environmental features.* Between reviewing existing literature and coding newly collected data, I jotted down theoretical memos into a digital document. During the memoing process, and in consultation with existing literature on materiality, I realized that the dirt jumps themselves occupied a role that was not entirely material or purely natural. These initial memos eventually led to the formulation of the *pure natural* and *(re)natural* concepts advanced in this article.

Using "theoretical coding"—a coding method that "lends form to the focused codes" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 150) allowed for developing relationships between the initial codes. For example, this step drew relationships between the *digging crews* code and *decision making* codes. My analysis revealed the seemingly disjointed nature of decision making at a larger level, but the cohesive decisions and outcomes accomplished by the smaller crews of builders. The codes of *nostalgia* and *legacy* were intimately tied to material 'things' within the space. These material 'things' seemed to play a role in the decision making processes of disparate digging crews. These codes led to the formulation of Theme 1: Dispersed Interconnected Decision Making, presented in the findings. This

same process of theoretical coding related codes such as *activity regulating* and *activity prompting* with *flooding* and *environmental features* to form Theme 2: Agency of the Pure Natural. Theme 3: Staking Out Actorhood Through Material Identity, was developed primarily through reviewing field notes and analytical memos and comparing them with codes such as *uniqueness of location* and *city relationships*.

FINDINGS

Locating the 'Pure Natural'

Scholars have called for a clearer explanation for how natural agency fits among a relational view of materiality (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). I suggest, as a starting point, that discussions of nature would benefit by clarifying the *pure natural* from *(re)natural* and the material. I do not intend for these terms to suggest a split between human/social/material/natural agency. Indeed, others have noted the difficult nature of discussing the "autonomous (yet relative) character of all forms of agency" (Cooren, 2018, p. 143) without conflating the human and nonhuman. I advance the terms as a way to discuss the pure natural while also recognizing that humans, and the pure natural, are not absolute sources of action. I provide these terms simply as an analytical tool for discussing the natural vis-à-vis other forms of materiality—not to suggest the natural is theoretically different or more important than the social.

One approach is to view materiality as a spectrum that varies by degree of alteration at human hands. At the far left end of the spectrum, the *pure natural* constitutes perceptible non-sentient things and forces such as sky, wind, rain, trees, foliage, soil, sunlight, temperature, weather events—aspects of the world outside the bounds of sentience and human creation. At the complete opposite end (right) of the spectrum is what we commonly understand as material. The crossover point for moving from *pure natural* to material is

when the pure is transformed, or altered into an *irreversible* new state to achieve new outcomes. For instance, the mineral bitumen, also known as asphalt, is *pure natural* because it is an organic element of the earth. Once heated, mixed with other cutting agents, and used as a highway paving surface, it can be classified as material.

But what of instances where the pure natural is altered, yet retains its natural characteristics? For example, crops are planted by human design to produce food, and natural trees are planted as living fences to prevent snowdrifts in the American Midwest. Occupying a space close to *pure natural* on the spectrum (but not entirely pure) would be what I term the *(re)natural*. The prefix of re- indicates a return to a previous condition or repetition (e.g. reshape, recount, rebuild, renew). The pure natural can be shaped into a new form, and then reshaped back into a state close to its original form. A sand castle at the beach is not purely natural, but it is not so far removed from its original state as to be incapable of conversion back to *pure natural*. Conversely, the materiality of a rubber tire will never return to the pure natural state of a rubber tree. A sheet of paper can be recycled into a napkin, but it will never return to its *pure natural* state of a tree. Living snow fences and crops do not conveniently grow where humans desire, rather, they are (re)moved and (re)planted, while retaining their mostly natural characteristics in a way that serves human interests. The dirt jumps in this study are a form of *(re)natural* where soil is combined with water and pressure to create a bicycle jump. The dirt jumps could return to a state very close to *pure natural* if formed back into their previous unaltered shape and slope.

Viewing materiality on a spectrum means that material elements can occupy many points along the continuum. For example, a log cabin (material) may resemble the pure natural trees of which it was formed, whereas a smartphone (material) is far removed from the pure natural elements of zinc and copper. That is, materiality can be closer, at least in resemblance, to its original state of pure natural (e.g., gravel, a wooden walking stick,

granite counter top) or far removed (e.g., a rubber tire, robot). Context should also be kept in mind when determining whether matter is *pure natural*, *(re)natural*, or material. Ice, for instance, could be considered pure natural or (re)natural depending on context. Placing river water (pure natural) into a freezer would yield ice cubes ((re)natural) that could be melted back into the original state of pure natural river water. Conversely, ice in the polar Antarctic is considered pure natural as it is unaltered by humans. The concept of pure natural operationalized in this work does not encapsulate birds, animals, or humans—all of which are sentient beings. I generally posit the *pure natural* as perceptible properties of the earth undisturbed by human intervention. Further, birds and humans would not fit the *(re)natural* category. One cannot reshape a bird into a new form and then convert it back to its original state.

This matters for studying organizationality because one cannot assume that *this* materiality is a static thing with stable or predictable interactions with organizing. Therefore, a relational approach to the agency of the pure natural will allow for better capturing this actant's role in organizationality. Some pure natural aspects differ from forms of materiality previously studied. Materiality, such as tables, rocks, computers, staplers, memo notes, hammers, etc., have been described as "persistent, obdurate, and unrelenting" (Leonardi & Barley, 2011, p. 106) because, generally speaking, there is a degree of consistency in experiencing this materiality. One typically expects an inert sheet of paper to function in a certain way. Conversely, the pure natural exhibits a dynamic, fluid, and often unstable character. Weather events can change moment to moment. Modest amounts of rain drops are often welcomed as they nourish crops, but excessive rain drops in a short time frame can collectively form a raging torrent of destructive flood water. The point is that the pure natural exists in a state of flux and instability somewhat unlike other forms of materiality. With a better conception of nature vis-à-vis other forms of materiality,

I can proceed with explaining how the pure natural (always in relationship with humans, (re)natural, and other materials) comes to constitute degrees of organizationality.

It would be a partial story to focus *only* on the role of the pure natural in communicating about this collective. Much could be written about objects, bodies, signs, (re)naturals, and other forms of materiality at 18th street. However, my focus in this article is to highlight the communicative role of the pure natural in contributing to organizationality. Therefore, the findings are focused primarily on natural materiality, but other forms of materiality, such as objects and bodies, are often referenced in fleshing out my argument.

Theme 1: Dispersed Interconnected Decision Making

Interviews and observations revealed that activities of this group resembled a fluid social collective more than an established or conventional organization. When asked during a field interview if there was clear leadership at 18th Street, a rider commented "No. We're all doing shit. No one runs anything. You don't own it. If you don't own it, you don't run it." This response represents the intimate connection between the organizationality and the natural world. The comment "no one runs anything" references the lack of clear or central leadership regarding the operation of the space, but the "it" that is unowned is the land, dirt, and jumps that exist in the space. In keeping with what is considered a fluid collective, boundaries are lacking, and the status of membership is hard to pin down.

The idea of interconnected decision making as a basis for establishing organizationality operates differently in this collective. Decisions made in this space are not necessarily as interconnected as they are in a terrorist network, hacker group, or social movement. That is, decision making is not coordinated across all, or even a majority, of the participants. Instead, instances of connected decision making happen among smaller

sporadic groups that rotate in and out of the boundaryless space. A rider with over 10 years of experience at 18th Street and other dirt jump locations recalled:

> There's never really one set of crew that will work there because if they do, they kind of get burned out because you work really hard to keep it up, but then you're gone for a day. People ride it. Kids climb on it. Things fall apart and you gotta go back and do all this work and it just kind of happens again.

As this rider notes, maintenance of the jumps often happens through, what he terms, different "crews" of people. Others commented on the sporadic and rotational nature of these digging crews. Mark (all names are pseudonyms) relayed:

> Some guy will come in for a few months and be stoked, and he'll just be digging all the time, and then work on something or fix everything, and then he'll move away, or he'll get a job, and then no one's digging. And then you'll have some other guys coming to dig, and they do their own thing, and they all tear down what the other guy built, and start building stuff.

Nora also noticed how often crews cycle through, "I've seen a lot of crews of friends just shift gears. They'll bounce around, like, 'Oh, we're gonna go dig at Texano [another dirt jump location].' And they'll get motivated and start going up there." The accomplishment of organizationality through interconnected decision making remains at the level of smaller groups of individuals instead of a large, cohesive collective.

Material ties for decision making. Although disparate digging crews construct the space, a "decided order" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) is achieved *through* the material tying together of seemingly disparate decisions. A key puzzle that CCO scholars tend to grapple with is explaining how situated and fleeting interactions can "scale up" to the level of a stabilized organization. One answer for this puzzle is that actions become "dislocal" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008) when they produce effects at a distance, meaning conversations and actions made in the past become relevant in a current interaction. For instance, a policy

decided upon in the past can be invoked in the present. The continual reference to this past action leads to order and stability—characteristics of organizing.

Much of the research on scaling up has focused on the role of conversations, texts, technologies, and humans in scaling up interactions. The pure natural and (re)natural in conjunction with all manner of materiality, plays a key role in bringing these past decisions to the forefront for "another next first time" (Cooren, 2010). The enduring quality of materiality, the ability of individuals to reference past material and embodied experiences, and the inherent evolution of the space as it adapts to human and non-human use all create opportunities for dislocation of organizational processes and constituting organizationality.

These decisions are interconnected by an ongoing relationship of materiality, the (re)natural dirt jumps, and social nostalgia of the group. For instance, decisions that a crew of diggers made in the past over where jumps should be placed are still impacting what other dig crews can do today. During observation sessions I often witnessed several riders debating what kind of jumps they wanted to build or what should be torn down or reconfigured. Often times these conversations revolved around the history and originality of some specific jumps. Riders reminded others of how a specific jump was often featured in famous BMX videos and should therefore not be torn down. During an interview with Geoff, I walked through the park recording my conversation and discussing his experiences in helping to create the park in the 90s. As we walked, he recalled the history of specific jumps; "I'll show you here. Yeah, right here. Right here was the third set. That was actually back here. So the first set was right there, where Triple Crown is. It was an eight foot table top." The jumps he referenced had changed slightly in form over the years, but their location remained constant. Many riders described certain features of the park as "sacred," "original," or "historic." The physical materiality of the jumps themselves seemed to embody past actions and bring them to the forefront of decision making. Here the

(re)natural provides both a material and symbolic *shape* for the collective that communicates organizationality for both active participants, who have insights into how the space has changed and been sustained over time, and for non-participants who see the pure natural and (re)natural elements as both enduring and malleable by members.

When asked what challenges 18th Street faces, Gary claimed, **"**that's the only thing that's holding us back is its location and sacredness, I guess, would be… It's like a burial ground – you can't really do anything to it except hard manual labor which is what it all boils down to." Along similar lines, Hogan noted that he was in favor of "tearing out all the old stuff and completely redoing it and not really caring about the history of lines or whatever or, 'That's Main Line. That's sacred' and shit like that that." Hogan refers to "Main Line," a set of jumps that were built in the late 90s. These comments exhibit the organizationality of 18th Street by revealing the inertia and obstacles presented by the existing materiality. Despite the lack of formal restrictions on altering the space, individuals' agency was limited in two senses: the pure natural and (re)natural often made changes logistically difficult, and changes of long-established material aspects would be considered a violation of the collective.

During building and maintenance sessions at the site members of the collective expressed wanting to build something new or tweak an existing jump, but being unable to do so because it would throw off the 'flow' of another line of jumps. Changing the angle of a jump, or moving the location of a jump even as little as six inches, can throw off a rider's speed causing him or her to be too fast or slow to safely land the next jump. That is, the pure natural and re(natural) restricted *how* the participants construct jumps. The members of the collective may want to make changes to the layout of the park, however, the nostalgia for the history and memories of the jumps, as well as the necessity of preserving the flow of the jump line, prevents them from making any substantial layout

changes. That is, past “upstream” (Cooren, 2006, p. 85) decisions are materialized through the jumps themselves and matter to the ongoing decisions actors make.

Materiality combined with (re)natural also provides endurance to the decisions of others. One particular jump near the middle of the park is referred to as “Maytag” because a washing machine or refrigerator was buried within the jump in the early 90s. Using a large household appliance as filler material within the jump (see Figure 4.1) provided a quick shortcut. Whenever the topic of rebuilding the “Maytag” jump came up, someone would remind the group of how difficult it would be to dig out the large appliance. In this instance, it is not only the (re)natural dirt jumps that interconnect decision making: it is a combination of a variety of materiality (the appliance) with the (re)natural.

Figure 4.1: A household appliance buried within a jump

As these examples illustrate, the early participants' decisions of where to place a jump and how to build it are still guiding actions of the collective today. Materiality plays a hand in reminding the riders of these past actions and guiding their present/future decision making. This example illustrates the relational perspective and hybrid agency of both humans, materials, and the natural environment. There is nothing explicitly preventing the collective from reconfiguring jumps as they like. However, during my observations at 18th Street, members of the collective honored the history of the jumps and mostly left them intact. This demonstrates the centrality of materiality in the process of organizing and constituting of an organization; individuals could see, feel, and recall their physical experiences with the jumps and came to expect a level of stability and consistency regarding the environment. Both individually, and in turn collectively, decisions in the present regarding the site were made with the history of past decisions (made present through materiality) and these decisions then created and sustained the collective. Face to face interactions, or even online communications, are not needed for interconnected decision making to occur. Materiality holds together seemingly disparate instances of decision making.

Theme 2: Agency of the Pure Natural

The pure natural's contributions to organizationality can be witnessed in at least two ways: from a point of securing the space amid institutional forces that threaten the jumps' continued existence, and as cyclically prompting contributions that sustain the space.

Securing the space. From an overarching standpoint, pure natural forces and aspects of the earth at 18th Street provide a space for the jumps to survive. Interviewees

were quick to point out that the only reason the city allows 18th Street to exist on public property is because the plot of land lies within the flood plain of a nearby creek. Geoff recalled originally building jumps on the property because, "They [the city] were just using it just to get rid of shit because this is all floodplain. It all floods. They couldn't really use it for anything, so we just cleared the trail coming in here." Griff acknowledged the forgotten nature of the plot of land:

> I love the aspect of things being what the general populist thought of as being waste, of being this land that had no value, other than to let the creek run through it, and prevent downtown condos from flooding. I love that I get to be a part of something that nobody wanted to touch.

The fact that the pure natural materiality of the nearby creek has a tendency to flood (see Figure 4.2 of flooding in May 2015) provides a justification for the land to be used as recreation space instead of being sold to developers. Paradoxically, the pure natural floods that frequently destroy the jumps are the only reason they are allowed to exist in the first place.

Figure 4.2: Flooded 18th Street jumps in May 2015.

Prompting action. Pure natural forces of destruction, such as heat, excessive rain, flooding, wind, and growth of unwanted plants, exhibit agency by damaging the jumps. Here agency refers to the ability to take or facilitate action, and not necessarily any specific intent accompanying action. When taking a relational approach these environmental elements spur action (i.e., organizing) toward repair. The natural elements that cause destruction encourage members of the collective to be constructive with the jumps. For example, the jumps flooded to the point of complete submersion on Memorial Day 2015. This weather event was so destructive that it prompted a lot of renewed attention to the site in the weeks that followed. Other environmental prompts for organizing operate on a more repetitive cycle. For example, leaves and other fallen tree limbs often need to be swept from the runways in the Fall and weeds trimmed from the jumps in the Spring. If the jumps are too dry they will crack and crumble. Conversely, if the jumps are too wet then they cannot be ridden. In each situation, the pure natural destructive forces of the environment are prompting further actions by the collective. That is, the matter of the pure natural comes to "matter" (Cooren, 2015) by expressing itself in a way that encourages organizational collective actions. An important note here is that, although I use the common language of the pure natural "triggering" or "prompting" human action, this is a relational agency. The pure natural's materiality is reliant upon human action to sustain the organizationality.

Beyond simply prompting collective activity, natural elements also make a difference in *when* the park can be maintained. The soil at 18th Street, and many other dirt jump locations, is of a consistency that it must be saturated with water in order to stack it and pack it into a recognizable dirt jump form. One rider reminisced about the early days of digging: "back in the day when it rained, I mean we'd dig there all day. If it rained like last night, go down there and start bailing water and then just start rebuilding or digging new stuff." The ground is so dry and hard packed at many jump locations that it is almost

necessary to work on the jumps after a big rainfall. Conversely, if Appleton experiences a drought or heat wave, then the jumps tend to be neglected until it rains. On a hot day in September, I asked Geoff why no one was at the park during an interview. He stated:

> It's a slow time right now. It usually picks up when it cools off a little bit. It's just so hot. Especially older people. My body temperature heats up a lot faster now. So there are less people, but there'll be people showing up again when it's nice.

Nora also reflected on the precarity of the pure natural: "Summers here are really hot, and it's really tough on the dirt, and it's just like a long hiatus for – so, our seasons have been kind of intense lately where that – the weather affects the population of spots." While rain makes digging easier, too much rain makes digging harder. Martin noted that the soil has a sweet spot between too wet and too dry:

> It's good clay, so it's pretty easy to dig, and it's easy to recognize when it's too wet to dig, because it'll stick to your shovel; and, if it's too dry to dig, you're probably not gonna pick up a shovel, because it's too hard.

I asked Bern what he considered to be the most important element for building dirt jumps. He stated, "Moisture. If you build too dry, it doesn't stay together. If you build too wet, it's hard to get it to hold and stay up. So, you gotta build in sections but not – it's very temperamental."

The precarity of the weather and "temperamental" nature of the soil leads to less structured forms of organizationality. That is, the fluidity nature of this collective matches the unpredictably of the pure natural. For example, Carl rode at 18th Street in the early 2000s before starting his own dirt jump location north of the city. Initially he tried to work with a mountain bike trail advocacy club to construct the dirt jumps, but soon found that the procedures of the organization did not take into account the agency of the natural environment:

> The pump track stuff is very weather dependent. I was always digging within a few days of good rain, whereas this club, they wanted things planned out weeks ahead of time… that's been a little difficult with me doing these berms [a banked up turn] and stuff. Here I am building dry dirt berms over there, I would've never done that before, but now I kind of have to because it's a planned workday. I can't just tell everybody "Hey, next time it rains good meet me out here."

Carl stated that the mountain bike club used Meetup.com, an online social networking site that facilitates group outings, to plan trail workdays far in advance. For Carl, the natural environment conditions, such as rain and moisture content of the soil, dictated when certain trail features could be constructed.

This example helps to explain why more conventional organizational forms may not be as effective in this setting. The restrictive nature of the more traditional trail advocacy organization did not take into account the nuances of dirt jump building or the agency exhibited by the pure natural. Similar to the flooding, a large tree limb could unexpectedly fall and block off the course. This event would prompt informal interconnected decision making (i.e. organizing) at 18th Street to figure out how to move it so they can continue riding or building. Simply put, the irregularity of pure natural agency makes more traditional organizing strategies less effective. The agency of both materiality and the pure natural in all of these examples is considered "hybrid" because it is shared with humans (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008). Riders could neglect to sweep the leaves or disregard the overgrown plants and let nature reclaim the space. In other words, the human actors must acknowledge the agency of natural destructive forces and take counteracting action.

Theme 3: Staking Out Actorhood Through Material Identity

A key component to achieving organizationality is that the social entity is identifiable or addressable. Along similar lines, Cooren (2010) states, "any collective exists through its various incarnations and embodiments" (p. 155) and, a "crucial" (p. 146)

component of embodying something is naming. In other words, attributing action to a named collective helps constitute the organizationality of the social entity. In this section, I show how various forms of materiality, along with contributions by disparate individuals, can stand in for "carefully crafted and staged" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) identity claims. These identity claims happen in at least two ways: *odd presence/absent expected* and *contributing identity*.

Odd presence/absent expected. Perhaps what is *not* located in this space speaks just as loudly as what *is* located there. Interviewees stressed the fact that 18th street was an *odd presence* amidst the downtown urban landscape of Appleton. Appleton has experienced rapid growth over the past two decades with much of the downtown real estate being developed into restaurants, multi-level office and retail buildings, or high-rise condominiums. The land that 18th street occupies is likely worth millions of dollars. Penn commented on the uniqueness of the jumps' location: "There were just trails in the middle of downtown. This is amazing . . . most people who have trails, they're in some woods, hopefully it doesn't get developed into a subdivision." Another rider stated, "it's crazy – in the middle of [Appleton} and it's just allowed to be here." Given the other high-rise buildings near this downtown area, one would almost *expect* for this particular plot of land to be developed, so it is a bit unexpected to see the large piles of earth carefully crafted into dirt jumps. Gary put it this way:

> The second you see this place, you probably have 20 questions. "How'd that get there? Why is he doing that? How did he go that high in the air? Why is he going that fast? How did he do it that slow? Why is it like this? How come the city allows this?" There's a million things that pop into your head.

Gary acknowledged that simply seeing the spectacle of 18th Street will often elicit many questions, but also that the space is recognizable as distinct from its surroundings. Passers by to 18th Street also expressed similar sentiments of shock and awe when I informally

conversed with them during observation sessions. Griff, a BMX rider in his forties, talked about taking his son to the park and talking with others:

> I talk to these other adults, these other parents, and they just know when they drive by there, their jaws drop, and they're just amazed at what's happening . . . But the parents, most of them don't know [about the collective] . . . But, every time I do go I'm always out there with a broom and the water hose . . . your kids gonna ride better, it's safer, less accidents will happen and the kids gonna improve faster on a track that's maintained. And so, they get it, they finally, I think, understand that it takes work.

Appleton has acres of parks, trails, and green spaces; however, the large sculpted piles of dirt, shovels and picks strewn about, and artifacts such as a windmill made of old broken shovels, communicate that this is no ordinary park. This combination of the site, the pure natural, and material artifacts communicates the existence of an informal fluid *collective* instead of a tax-payer funded venture or private commercial bike park. In other words, the *absence* of *expected* high-rise developments, combined with the *odd presence* of a uniquely sculpted (re)natural environment and the artifacts and bodies that occupy the space, work together in crafting a social address of this fluid collective.

Contributing identity. Because membership boundaries are ill defined in fluid collectives, multiple individuals can attribute actions to the organization. In the organizationality framework, "literally anybody" can contribute to the organization so long as actions or communications are carried out on behalf of the collective (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015. p. 1012). Findings from 18th Street demonstrate that not only can anyone contribute, but that mere *contributions* and use of the space can take the place of carefully staged identity claims. Instead of carefully crafted assertive or declarative "speech acts" (Searle, 1969), actions—even *without conscious recognition or intention*—serve as the identity claims for the collective, thus aiding in achieving organizationality.

The organizational endeavor of 18th street is intimately tied to the physical space in that the contribution to the endeavor *is* the physical reworking of the natural environment. That is, the sculpted dirt jumps within the delimited spatial location are one of many communicative actors that contribute to the identity, and thus organizationality, of the collective. Because the contribution is so intimately tied to the space there is no need to verbally or otherwise linguistically proclaim any organizational affiliation—the contribution itself becomes the communicative act establishing that some form of collective activity occurs in this small urban space. At 18th street, the actual output of the collective endeavor becomes the embodiment of that collective. The work of the collective and the attribution of the collective are one and the same.

Materiality makes attribution and actorhood possible by providing the collective's mode of being. The physical location on 18th street, combined with the *odd presence/absent expected*, the pure natural trees, the (re)natural jumps—all make attributions to the identity of the collective. Participants do not have to carefully craft a communicative claim to identity. Anyone who enters the public space is "in" the collective. In turn, the fluid collective of 18th street comes to "appropriate" (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011) the activities within the space. In sum, Theme 3 shows how materiality, alongside human actions, comes to communicatively contribute to the organizationality of this fluid collective by creating an identity for the space.

DISCUSSION OF ORGANIZATIONALITY

A key question CCO scholars grapple with is "*who* or *what* [emphasis original] can act on behalf of an organization" (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017, p. 13). At 18th street, the physical site and environment are not simply communicating on *behalf* of an organization—it *is* the embodiment that constitutes organizationality. The existence of the

collective is entangled in a symbiotic relationship with the physical space of 18th Street. The collective would not exist without the physical and material space that represents it. The output of the collective is the thing that signals identity and actorhood.

Organizationality is "a precarious accomplishment" that needs to be "repeatedly reinstated" through identity claims and attribution to an overall "organizational address" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 1030). Materiality, in all its forms, is playing a role in this reinstatement process. Contrary to other studies showing how identity claims are a way to claim ownership over actions (e.g. a terrorist act, a hacktivist operation) identity claims perpetuated through materiality and individual actions simply reaffirm the value of the space amid institutional forces that may destroy or redevelop the space of the fluid collective. In more traditional organizing contexts, it may not be as necessary to continually re-establish organizational legitimacy. For example, an organization occupying a building or office complex is afforded a relatively stable marker of organization that changes little over time. Conversely, the organizationality of the dirt jump site is in a constant state of flux requiring continual actions and reconfiguring. While participants are not making verbal speech act claims to identity, pure natural weather events prompt individuals to occupy the space and reaffirm its value to the wider community. For example, the flooding events prompt renewed attention to the site. Heavy rains also spur organizing to combat the damaging effects of the pure natural. The presence of bodies (i.e. materiality) in the space reaffirms the value without requiring a repeated verbal reinstatement of identity. This study also moves beyond a reliance on discourse as performative, or capable of attributing actorhood. Attribution processes are not the sole property of individual communicators, or materiality, but are accomplished through the intermingling of the social, pure natural, and material. That is, materiality and the pure natural takes up space within a "chain of agencies" (Castor & Cooren, 2006).

The 18th Street Dirt Jumps are only allowed to exist due to environmental features of the land, such as occupying a flood plain, and many of the pure natural elements are literally tied to the earth (e.g. trees, slope of the land). With the 18th street jumps being located on a street of the same name, and the collective being intimately tied to the physical matter of the jumps, the collective could not easily move across town and maintain organizationality. That is, the "collective's mode of being" (Cooren, 2010, p. 150) is a combination of the absence of something expected, presence of something odd in the delimited space of the park, the manicured jumps, and the humans and artifacts found in the space.

Schoeneborn et al., (2018) point out that CCO scholars should begin to probe the relationship between cognition and organizationality. Whether speaking of material communication as ventriloquism or incarnation, human actors have the intention to communicate. Conversely, at 18th Street though the physical site itself and material artifacts found within it communicate the existence of a fluid collective, the same intention is not present. This study joins an emerging line of research in showing the non-intentional side of organizationality (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015). The participants of this study were able to contribute to the organizationality of a social collective, without making any cognizant claims or references to an "organizational address" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). We can view the natural environment as entangled in a relationship of agencies. Whether or not someone building or riding the jumps *intends* for their actions to communicate on behalf of the collective, by simply contributing to 18th street through their actions they are further upholding the identity and actorhood of the collective and thus contributing to organizationality.

Material elements also come to represent the collective in a way that a simple sign or organizational website is unable. Perhaps no other form of materiality is as obdurate and

ever-present as aspects of the pure natural material environment. Pure natural and (re)natural forms such as trees and sculpted soil are always present, communicating the existence of a collective and also shaping what the collective can accomplish. One does not need to access websites or physical edifices to witness the collective. The pure natural, bodies, and material artifacts, as opposed to human designed inherently communicative elements (e.g. mission statement, website, logo), carry the burden of "incarnating" (Cooren, 2010, p. 145) the fluid spirit of the collective. In particular, the pure natural steadfastly carries the communicative burden 24 hours a day. In this particular situation, a case where a clearly defined organization is lacking for both 'members' and 'the public,' the constitutive role of objects, sites, environment, and bodies become even more crucial in representing that some form of collective action/organization exists.

The findings showed how a combination of the pure natural, material, and other artifacts tie together decision making processes of disparate digging crews and contribute to organizationality. This intersects with another key tenet of MS theorizing—scaling and dislocating. While scaling up, dislocation, and coorientation processes were not the central premise of this investigation, the findings reveal how the collective's "here and now" decision not to dig up the old refrigerator placed "there and then" (in the past) will also influence the downstream "there and then." The local decision is "also always already" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2008, p. 124) transcendent because these seemingly small decisions, whether made in the past or present, will impact future organizing. In ten years if a new group of BMX riders decide to deconstruct the jump, unaware of the appliance buried within, they will unearth the appliance and have to debate (i.e., organize) as to whether or not digging out the refrigerator is the best course of action. That is, past decisions are interconnected to future decision making *through* materiality.

This study also reaffirms the value of a relational ontology for theorizing organizationality. As an analytical tool, the relational approach has allowed for theorizing natural forces that are not as easily witnessed or felt as say, a car, hammer, technology, or paper memo. Elements of the world, such as winds and temperatures, can be discussed as material by unpacking what sustains its existence. A relational approach allows for developing the *pure natural* as a nominal way of discussing the "thingness" of this materiality, while also recognizing it occupies a complicated relationship among other agencies. Interestingly, the pure natural differs from other forms of materiality commonly studied in terms of its fluctuating and slippery character. The car, hammer, technology, and paper memo listed above are, for the most part ,stable entities in terms of their material composition. Elements of the pure natural, such as weather, are in a constant state of flux which might help to explain the necessity of fluidity in organizing among this group.

This study also examines a form of fluidity not commonly studied. Beyond simply being a collective marked by unclear membership, the physical space itself is free and open. The actual physical boundaries of this organization are non-existent. This type of fluidity can be contrasted with fluid online collective action groups that, although fully classified as fluid, still contain digital boundaries such as message board login requirements. This space is literally an open park space that anyone can enter at any time.

Moving beyond fluid recreational groups, the organizationality framework and a focus on materiality could illuminate organizational phenomenon in more conventional organizations. The collective in this study is able to respond to the precarity of natural elements *because* of its fluidity. For instance, the permeable boundaries of this group allow for both easy entry to the collective, and sporadic contributions. Perhaps high reliability organizations (HRO), such as disaster response groups, could adapt organizational forms that embrace fluidity in order to better respond to the turbulence of nature. Participants of

this study also indicated the restrictive nature of the conventional trail advocacy organization. Volunteer organizations whose missions are closely aligned with the pure natural could pay closer attention to the agency of those elements in their ability to complete tasks.

This study makes several contributions to organizational theory and studies of organizationality. First, the analysis responds to calls for clarification on how scholars can name and discuss the agency of natural elements (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017) by offering the *pure natural* and *(re)natural* as a way to theorize agential effects of natural elements. I advance the *pure natural* and *(re)natural* to aid in theorizing, not to suggest that nature is entirely separate from the social. This work also complicates our understanding of materiality that is *not* pure natural by suggesting that materiality exists on a spectrum by degree of alteration at human hands, rather than simply material/immaterial. The study shows how the pure natural and (re)natural are active participants in the communicative processes that accomplish organizationality.

Second, this study adds more depth to the organizationality perspective in a few key ways. It shows how interconnected decision making is more complex than it may seem at a surface level. Rather than decision making being truly interconnected on a large scale, the fluidity of this collective is characterized more by small crews of individuals making decisions that are disparate from other groups. Materiality becomes the glue that interconnects the seemingly disparate decisions of the various groups to form a greater overall whole (i.e., a higher degree of organizationality). The study also shows the value of longer term qualitative ethnographic methods when paired with the organizationality framework. If an outside observer were to observe activity of this collective at a single point in time, it would be harder to pin down the organization (in the noun form) of the

collective. The long-term approach utilized here allowed for theorizing this social group as achieving, at least temporarily, a degree of crystallization.

Third, this article has argued for *absence* as capable of communicating. The lack of something expected in a certain social and institutional setting can communicate as forcefully as the odd things that comprise the space. Along similar lines, this article theorizes how identity claims can happen without communicative speech acts or conscious intention. The contributions of individuals within this space stand in for carefully crafted identity claims and make attribution and actorhood possible—key components of achieving organizationality.

Cooren (2010) notes that the contributions from various forms of material agents become nearly invisible intermediaries (p. 23). For example, fuel injectors, electrical current, and petrol that make a vehicle operate as intended are transparent unless something calls attention to that actor. I argue that the pure natural environment is often treated as an invisible backdrop to organizing, lost among the plenum of other agencies, and this study helps to bring natural materials into our theorizing of agency and the constitution of organizationality.

Limitations

As with many qualitative studies, this research is context specific. Some of the arguments made, such as the uniqueness of the environment communicating the existence of a collective, are intimately tied to the site of study. However, the natural environment certainly manifests in other organizational processes. For instance, much of the high reliability work, such as firefighting, swift water rescues, or natural disaster responses, are entangled with the natural. Researchers should also continue to investigate the natural material environment in other organizing contexts to see if the manifestations are similar

or dissimilar to those discussed in this article. Materiality, and the pure natural, are central, not peripheral, to organizationality. As the study illustrates, the pure natural environment surrounds, comprises, and plays a role in accomplishing organizationality, yet little attention has been paid to this actant.

Chapter 5: The Communicative Practices That Sustain

Amid the record breaking U. S. government shutdown of late 2018 to early 2019, many "public goods" have gone partially or completely unfunded. Public recreation areas have had to operate providing limited services. With few tax dollars and limited resources dedicated to the creation and maintenance of public recreation and leisure spaces, increasingly citizens are having to be proactive in maintaining or creating these spaces. In other instances, individuals act outside the boundary of formal organizing to construct their own spaces for recreation and leisure. In this chapter of the dissertation I examine the communicative practices that sustain the fluid collective of the 18th Street Dirt Jumps. After extended engagement in the field site I noticed that the collective activity of 18th street is fraught with tensions, paradox, and disorder. As the tensions of this collective group began to emerge from the data, I paid more attention to the types of tensions and the communicative practices that attempt to resolve, manage, or respond to those tensions. Findings develop a categorization of the three dominant tensions of planning, producing, and essence of the space. The overall contribution of this chapter lies in presenting an inductive model of three overall tensions and the communicative practices used to balance those tensions. The model explains how successfully managing those tensions allows the fluid collective to be characterized as *vision flexible*, and *material flexible,* which recursively sustain the group's existence. In order to understand how the practices balance tensions, it is first necessary to briefly introduce how practices have been conceptualized.

PRACTICE THEORY

Emerging from the philosophical and sociological work of theorists such as Bourdieu (1990) and Giddens (1984), practice theory looks at the intersections of micro human activity and larger society wide structures. The long tradition of practice based

research experienced a resurgence in the late 90s and early 00s. This resurgence is often referred to as the "practice turn" and codified as such in Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and von Savigny's (2001) edited volume *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory.* Defining what is and is not practice proves challenging because scholars use the concept in different ways, and "often fail to actually examine and describe" (Leonardi, 2015, p. 236) work practices. Similarly, Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) claim, "there is no definitive cannon [*sic*] of practice theory" (p. 1241) while Schatzki (1997) argues practice theory is "at best a family of accounts" (p. 284). Nevertheless, scholars have attempted (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Leonardi, 2015) to clarify and draw boundaries around the common elements of this "umbrella concept" (Gherardi, 2012, p. 198).

The underlying idea of practice theory is that social life is an ongoing creation born out of people's day-to-day actions. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) consider practice as "consequential" in order to highlight how the microdynamics of everyday situated activities play a role in producing and reproducing social structures. Similarly, Leonardi (2015) views practices as the "primary performances through which organizing is accomplished" (p. 247). Reckwitz (2002) defines practice as "a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is understood" (p. 250) whereas Schatzki (2001) describes practice as "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity" (p. 11). In other words, the situated doing of 'things' leads to overall social structures.

Scholars frequently dissect the hiring routine as an example of practice (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Leonardi, 2015). Hiring an employee typically consists of posting a job advertisement, screening applicants, conducting interviews, making an offer, and negotiating terms. At a molar level, one could examine the situated actions of an individual crafting and posting the job announcement as a distinct practice. At a macro level, one

could bundle together all of these activities (posting, screening, interviewing, offering, negotiating) and consider them as representative of the hiring practice. That is, one can examine practices from a variety of empirical levels. For instance, Pentland and Feldman (2005) (see also Feldman & Pentland, 2003) consider organizational routines as a unit of analysis whereas Murphy's (1998) focus on the gesture is aimed at a microsocial level. Kuhn and Jackson (2008) take "episodes of interaction" (p. 460) as a conceptual starting point to understand the practices that accomplish knowledge in organizations. Orlikowski and Yates (1994) utilize "communicative genres," such as memos, meetings, and expense forms, as an analytical lens to investigate communicative practices. Rather than analyzing entire sentences or dialogical pairs, Pentland (1992) borrows Goffman's (1981) concept of "the move" as a unit of analysis to examine how call center technicians enact the structure of the organization through these particular forms of interaction.

Whether focused at a micro or macro level, practice scholars within organizational scholarship consider *how* people work as central to understanding organizations. Work is viewed as an action and not necessarily an outcome (Leonardi, 2015, p. 247). Practice-based studies are in part a critical response to what Gherardi (2012) calls a "regime" of optimizing and satisficing logic, a logic that focuses on work and organizing through the lens of rational models. Moving to a "logic of situation" (Gherardi, 2012, p. 26) focuses in on the active construction and carrying out of work. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) note that in the common box-and-arrow figures used to illustrate organizational theory:

> The boxes are always labeled, whereas the arrows are often unadorned by any text, as if they speak for themselves . . . entities are often reified, considered sufficiently meaningful independent of their use or performance. (p. 1248)

Practice theory places the emphasis on the arrows, or the "relationships and performances that produce outcomes in the world" (p. 1249). Considering my focus is on the arrows, or

communication processes, that lead to collective action, then practice theory is well suited for this dissertation.

Although different strains of practice theory exist, most discussions of practice characterize the phenomenon as being materially bound, recurrently enacted, temporally emergent, historically influenced, and goal oriented (Leonardi, 2015). Practices are "materially bound" (Leonardi, 2015) or "materially interwoven" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 12) in that they develop within a material world. Practices are not strictly social, or strictly material, rather, practices emerge through an ongoing negotiation between the agencies of human and nonhuman artifacts. As Reckwitz (2002) explains, "carrying out a practice very often means using particular things in a certain way" (p. 252). To say that practices are recurrently enacted or "mutually constitutive" (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) means that social orders, such as routines, institutions, cultures, and structures are produced through human actions, but those same structures also play a role in configuring human actions. Practices are "temporally emergent" (Leonardi, 2015) meaning they unfold over time. For instance, an organization can plan to deploy a new social media technology, but it is not until the users interact, accommodate, or resist the new technology over time that the work practices are formed. If employees resist this new social media technology because they perceive that it conflicts with historically successful ways of working, or historically based ideas of the role of social media in a work place, then employees demonstrate that practice is historically influenced. Lastly, practices are goal oriented in that individuals, particularly in organizations, conduct work practices in an attempt to achieve individual and organizational goals.

Barnes (2001) cautions that considering practice as a singular unified and identifiable thing obscures the fact that shared practices are essentially a composite of many separate and individualized habits. The practices of one individual may differ from another

and these individual level practices can change over time as people adapt to circumstances. The amalgamation of these individual practices form a collective accomplishment—even though there can be minor variations between practitioners at the individual level (Barnes, 2001).

The work of valet car parking may help illustrate this collective accomplishment. A typical practice of valet parking includes greeting the customer, writing the customer's name, make, model, type (e.g. sedan, truck) color, and tag number of the car on a valet ticket, parking the car in a 150-unit surface lot, storing the key, and then retrieving the car when the customer returns. Faced with an urgent growing line of cars waiting to be parked, some valets use shorthand on the tags or do not completely fill out the valet tag while others complete the tag entirely. The incomplete tags often cause confusion when the customer wishes to retrieve their car because the valets have trouble distinguishing the proper car from a sea of other cars. Despite the inadequate tag labeling, valet crews are able to adapt other micro practices to speed up operations and make up for lost time spent searching for the proper vehicle or adapt to the flow of cars needing to be parked or retrieved. For instance, in order to facilitate customers leaving more quickly, valets make sure each door is unlocked and automatically opens the rear hatch for people with luggage or strollers before handing the car back to the customer. Other valets make sure to reverse the vehicle into the parking spot to facilitate quick retrieval. The 3-5 person valet crew's individual practices differ, however, the successful *overall* operational practice of valet parking cars is made possible by an interdependent and adaptive linking of individual practices. That is, the overall practice of successful valet is more than the sum of individual habituated action, rather, individuals communicated to change practices over time. If one were to examine the practices of valet parking at an urban skyscraper with an underground parking garage,

or a tropical resort, he/she would likely find many variations in the individual practices that comprise successful operations.

In this article, I adopt Leonardi's (2015) viewpoint that practice is best understood as a space. This conceptualization considers practice "as a space in which various material and social phenomena become intertwined" (p. 225). Further, viewing practice as space shifts the researchers' attention from simply focusing on the *content* of work practices, to examining *why* those practices form, and *what* the practices do.

TENSIONS OF ORGANIZING

Early works in organizational communication scholarship were dominated by a focus on the rational side of organizing, often taking a functionalist view of communication. The organization was considered rational entities wherein goals are unidirectional and mutually shared, and communication should be orderly, clear, and devoid of emotion (Eisenberg, 1984; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). As the subdiscipline progressed, scholars have embraced a view of organizing as fraught with "dilemmas, disjuncture, contradictions, and dissonance" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014, p. 279) and communicative practice in particular is dominated by "irrationality, paradox, disruption, and irony" (Schoeneborn & Vasquez, 2017, p. 18). The "tension-centered scholarship" espouses to be more complex and in tune with the actual *practice* of organizing than a strictly rational approach. While much of the literature in this domain focuses on dialectics, irrationalities, ironies, double binds, contradictions, conflict, contrasts, and disruption, I focus primarily on the paradox perspective's treatment of organizational tensions.

Tensions. Tensions are discussed as an inherent fact of organizational life that are beyond control. Instead of attempting to resolve or overcome these tensions, the tension approach focuses on "ways of dealing" (Ashcraft & Trethewey, 2004; Trethewey &

Ashcraft, 2004) or accepting and managing the tensions. Stohl and Cheney (2001) describe tension as "a clash of ideas or principles or actions" (p. 353) that can lead to discomfort. A contradiction is when one idea, principle, or action stands in opposition to the other (Stohl & Cheney, 2001).

There are various approaches to the study of tension. For instance, Tracy (2004) viewed how tensions are framed by correctional officers. Gibbs (2009) examined how members of a software team negotiate tensions. Cooren, Matte, Benoit-Barne, and Brummans (2013) conceptualize tensions as coproduced through communication rather than how individuals actively manage or respond to tensions. Tensions are performed into existence through ongoing interactions.

The contours of loosely structured recreation groups in particular are one organizational context where tensions are rife. For example, if many of the organizational characteristics that are generally thought of as creating order, whether or not these characteristics actually create order in actual practice, (i.e., hierarchy, shared communication channels) are absent from this setting, then one may expect tensions and disorder to be commonplace. Few studies have considered materials as participating in the practice of managing tension.

The goal of this portion of the dissertation is to utilize practice theory to develop a model of the communicative practices that sustain collective activity amid organizational tensions. I am using 'communicative practice' to refer to any communicative act that sustains or supports the collective endeavor. These communicative acts are best understood as a bundle of practices that, when taken together, accomplish collective action. I will take a broad view of communication, paying attention to conversations at the sites, observations of activity, performances, and materials.

RQ1: What are the organizational tensions inherent to fluid collective organizing?

RQ2: How do communicative practices adapt to the organizational tensions of fluid collective organizing?

METHODS OF CHAPTER 5

Scholars have cautioned that employing a practice lens requires tolerating the complexity and ambiguity inherent to the realities of day-to-day organizational life (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). In order to make sense of such complex practices, Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) suggest committing to sustained and deep engagement within a field site, often observing practitioners as they engage in their activities. The ontological position I adopt in this paper is one of relationality, meaning the hybrid and interconnected relationship between the social and material brings things into existence. Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2019) claim that "understanding problems of working and organizing requires attention to concrete doings—the practices—in which these forces swirl" (p. 102). I move away from an anthropocentric explanation of communication to explain how the nexus of humans and materials form practices that sustain organizing. Borrowing Leonardi's (2015) terminology, I treat the field sites as a "space of practice" wherein "various material and social phenomena become intertwined" (p. 255). This means paying attention to how materials, language use, and bodily performances work together to form a practice.

Data Analysis

After a few months of engaged fieldwork, I noticed that the process of constructing the jumps was not necessarily an orderly affair. One instance in particular stood out. I, along with about 4 other individuals, spent about two weeks in the summer of 2015 converting the main gap jump line (a group of 4 large jumps) into a set of tabletop jumps. A tabletop jump, as opposed to a gap jump, has a flat surface on top and is less intimidating

for a newcomer to attempt. The consequences of failing to clear a gap jump are much higher than failing to clear over a tabletop jump. Filling in the gaps between the takeoffs and landers of the four jumps required an extensive amount of work to move that much dirt. Few people visited the space while the conversion to tabletops occurred. Once the conversion to table tops was complete, we saw a steady influx of riders coming into the space to try the reworked less intimidating jump line. After a short stretch of absence from the jump site, I returned to the field site in the Fall and found, to my surprise, a different crew of diggers were turning the tables back into gap jumps! After countless days and hours of work, the jumps had been re-converted to their prior state. In another incident I observed a crew of three diggers build a berm four feet high only to find a week later that someone else reduced it to two feet. Individuals would often craft and shape a jump near the back of the park into a state of perfection—despite every other prior jump in the line being of such poor quality that one could not possibly reach the perfected jump with enough speed to have a chance at clearing it successfully. In sum, after many incidents I began to notice that this site of *organizing* was not necessarily *organized* and jotted down theoretical memos on this phenomenon. Despite that the construction of the space was not necessarily *organized*, I did notice that some loosely grouped and patterned ways of interacting and *being* within these spaces were prevalent across multiple field sites. As these ideas developed, I kept an extensive log of theoretical memos on these forms of interaction. Memoing is a method to "tap the initial freshness of the analyst's theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in his thoughts" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 107). Glaser and Strauss specify that there is no scheduled routine for "amount to be coded per day" as the amount coded can vary based on the relevance of the material, richness of the data, and the number of memos recorded.

I continued my fieldwork and interviews in my original fashion, but I began to work in more questions concerning the nature of coordination and individual or shared visions for the jumps. I conducted an initial round of open coding intermittent with data collection. Following the guidelines of a constant comparative grounded theory approach, I paused coding as ideas emerged from the data in order to record memos. After this first round, I focused in on the field notes and interviews with a specific emphasis on articulating the dominant organizing tensions and paradoxes that perpetuated this space. This step of data analysis involved sifting and sorting the open codes into meaningful similar categories. This step produced the three overall tensions presented in the findings as illustration 5.1.

Reviewing my earlier theoretical memos concerning the patterned ways of interacting amid the (dis)organized nature of the space led me to consult the literature on organizing with a specific focus on processual explanations for how actions, discourse, and things play a hand in the creation of organization. I then reviewed my field notes and interview data with the guiding question of not only "what communicative practices can be identified?" but also, "why do these practices develop, and what is the outcome of those practices?" This analytical step required recoding some of the initial open codes that were purely descriptive. For instance, the code of *city relationships*, *bureaucracy*, *vision for the space*, *spurring contributions*, *difficulty of planning*, *disorganized nature*, and legal gray areas were a few sample codes that were further refined and investigated to develop the overall tensions inherent to the space. Next, I coded the data with a particular focus on the communicative actions—both discursive and materially combined. Sample codes from this step included *obstructing*, *hinting*, *suggesting*, and *visibility*. Taken individually the separate codes are not very illustrative. By refining those codes and grouping them together I formed larger categories of communicative practice. With the initial tensions and communicative practices established, I then returned to the data to determine links between

particular sets of practice and the tensions they help to balance. This final step allowed for forming the inductive Communicative Practice Sustainment Model.

FINDINGS

Recognizing Tensions

Participants are cognizant, at least at a surface level, of the approaching threats to the BMX jumps. In asking what challenges this group faced, many discussed threats of intervention from the city, the challenges of coordinating builds, and lack of meaningful contributions to the space. A more thorough analysis of the participant data allowed for grouping into three overall tensions: organic/civic, inclusion/consensus, and contributing/loafing that fall within the realms of essence, planning, and producing, respectively (see Table 5.1).

Realm	Tension	Example Quote
Essence	Organic/ Civic	I like the idea of us just sitting around, smoking a joint, like, "Hey, man. It'd be really cool to make this jump do that," and a couple other guys nodding their heads, like, "Yeah, man, that'd be fun." Like, fuck it. Next thing you know, in two days, that jump is built and done. And we can do that anytime we want. We don't have to clear that with anybody. There's a few things that hold us back. We would love to bring in machinery. We have plenty of friends that could move so much dirt and they could do it so efficiently and so quickly and benefit this whole place, and change the whole layout, but the City of Appleton would never allow that and we'd have to jump through a couple fiery hoops and go to a bunch of meetings to probably even have them ever consider that and they would still probably say no unless they're ripping these jumps out. Frankly it is normally difficult for governments to say yes to things, there are a lot that are saying no to things, unless they spend a lot of money and pay a contractor to do it
Planning	Inclusion/ Consensus	Trying to get people organized and planned at BMX trails is very, very challenging because just the nature of the group of people. No one wants to sit down at a table and agree on, "Okay, we're gonna do this way, and this jump, and have a berm here," and things like that. So, I think the fact that there are so many trails in town shows that the organization structure of trails don't always work because it's so disjointed. No one can get on the same page. No one can agree on everything.
Producing	Contributing/ Loafing	You can't get anyone to do anything. It's only people that have passion or interest in doing it, so that's why you have such a random collection of jumps and diggers.

Table 5.1: Organizing Tensions

I use the term essence to mean a character or spirit of the collective. The essence is not an official codified rule, but a vibe or social feel of the space. The essence of the space maintains a balance between, on the one hand and organic, ad-hoc, DIY collective of

individuals, and on the other, a city-sanctioned, bureaucratic, extension of the local civic leadership. Planning for what should be built within the space balances a tension between including multiple people in the decision processes, and the difficulty of achieving consensus among the participants. Being more inclusive of diverse opinions is desirable, but also makes achieving consensus (another desirable aspect) more difficult. The production of the jump site must balance the tension between increasing participation, while decreasing or filtering out the people who consume the park without helping. One should keep in mind that these tensions are all working together. The categorization represents a dominant grouping. For instance, while the main opposite to inclusion is consensus, it is possible that being more inclusive could also lead to more social loafing behaviors.

Tension 1: Organic/Civic

This tension indicates a push/pull between the characterization of the space as an organic, grass roots, or bottom up form of recreation versus a city-built or tax payer supported form of public good. The tension lies in the fact that the collective needs to integrate with the city to a certain degree to ensure survival of the space, but also needs to maintain distance in order to preserve the rogue organic nature of the group. Penn reflected on the group's relationship with local leadership, "The city knows we're there. They're comfortable with us being there as long as we're doing something." Penn went on to explain how the city contacted 18th street participants after a stagnant period: "They were like, 'Listen, if you guys don't start doing something, we're going to plow it.' The next thing you know, things started happening." After the city threatened to convert the space to another use (i.e., become more officially managed) participants began using the site more often and making sure that it looked busy. Some of the participants also discussed

the good things that could come from more city involvement, but ultimately stress the need to maintain distance. As Martin recalled:

> I'd love to see all the pits filled up, and the jumps made to drain properly. I don't think it's gonna happen, because it's in a flood plain it would be really challenging from a technical, or permitting standpoint, to add fill to the flood plain . . . the other thing is, you've got all the trees back there, so it'd be hard to – if the city came in, and became more of a "boss" so to speak, I think they would have issues with the trees.

In Martin's quote, the act of filling in the "pits" between jumps would likely require heavy equipment use—something only the city would be able to provide the "ok" for. Martin also worries about how the city would view the location of the jumps in relation to the root zones of trees. In fact, several participants mentioned the bureaucratic rule of "critical root zones" and how the city would discourage digging closely to trees. Other participants were hesitant to become too involved with the city as it might reduce the organic feel of the space. Mark recalled:

> I think since we've been organic the whole time, I don't think that there's any reason to change. I've sent the city links to those websites to show 'here's what city involvement does. Here's how you do it right from the get-go,' blah, blah, blah. But turning 18th Street into that now is not the way to go. And when you have the city involvement, it takes away from your sense of pride. We did all this by hand, blah, blah, blah. So, if they come in with bulldozers, set everything up, and then you got a water sprinkler system, it's like they built a skate park for you. You don't have the sense of pride.

As an original participant at the site, Manuel has interacted with the city in the past. He reflected on the ethos of, not seeking permission from the city, but building first and then asking forgiveness from the city later:

> Instead of just doing that permission/forgiveness situation they want us to look and ask, to be more official with it, to be more on the level. It's hard to go about it like that because things like this happen organically without the red tape of all the bureaucracy has taught me, 'is this okay?,' 'is this okay?,' It's sort okay after the fact. If someone starts digging and it grows from that, if you have to go through the red tape it seems a little less rebel, DIY.

Some participants even reflected on city built jump locations. Brian clarified the difference between "jumps" and BMX "trails," stating:

> I just don't really consider it trails unless it has the organic feel, it's built in the woods, you know what I'm saying? . . . Those [city built parks] to me are jumps. The dirt was dropped there, they mapped out a course, they built a course, and now they don't even have dirt transition, and they have wooden takeoffs on all the jumps.

Prior studies have revealed tensions of autonomy/control. I argue that the organic/civic is more than just freedom of action pitted against city rules—the participants of this collective want the *feel* of the park to be organic. Even if the city managed the park, yet allowed the diggers autonomy, individuals felt that the space would lose some of its organic charm.

Tension 2: Inclusion/Consensus

This tension indicates a push/pull between including many people in decisions over building and the difficult to achieve ideal of gaining consensus. The more people included, the harder it is to reach consensus. Participants state needing both; yet the attainment of one makes achieving the other more difficult. If the scales tip to being too inclusive, then conflicts fester over what should be built. For instance, Carl recalled how making these decisions often came down to "who was more aggressive or, I don't know – it's kind of ridiculous in a way, because there'd be showdowns where somebody would tear down a jump, and somebody else built it and that kind of thing." I asked Geoff how to decide what to build, he replied, "you just need a group consensus" but he did not have a clear idea of how to obtain this consensus in such a fluid environment. Mark, one of the original participants at 18th Street, commented on the struggles over inclusion/consensus:

> When you have a whole shitload of people digging at one trail, then you get this conflict. And one group of people well get pissed off and be like, "We're starting our own trails." So, it kinda balances out. If you had everyone at 18th Street, it's just a cluster, and that's one of the problems with organization is that there's too

> many Chiefs and not enough Indians. Everyone's got their own idea. No one can agree on anything. There is no proper planning. So, it's just random.

Despite the random nature that characterizes the space, the jumps persist. Other riders acknowledged that collectively planning the construction would be beneficial, yet that rarely happened. Manuel stated, "It's interesting because this is everyone's park, but everyone has to really – I think it takes a lot of – no one's talked about the communication here, there's a lack of it going on." Manuel notes that the park is "everyone's" highlighting the idea that 18th street is a public space where anyone can contribute, yet individuals rarely communicate and coordinate to form consensus over construction.

Tension 3: Contributing/Loafing

This tension indicates the push/pull between the need to recruit interested and capable contributors and the need to deter freeriding or social loafing behaviors that use the spot without making contributions. On the one hand more people are needed to help, but on the other, bringing more people in can also increase the amount of freeriding on others' labor. Hogan recounted his efforts to revive one of the main lines of the course. After spending months working on the line, he recalled:

> The second that opened up, I remember the day we were there, that they were running, all these kids showed up and I was like, "Of course, you go, they come. They weren't here yesterday digging and they weren't here a week ago."

Hogan emphasized that, although the prior month was spent working on the jumps, individuals did not show up to help or participate until the jumps were completed.

Part of the struggle lies in finding the right individuals. Brian reflected, "How do we advertise and get people to come out, but how do we get the *right* people… not every person that comes out there is what I would consider the right trail candidate." He went on to explain that when riders with big metal pegs come over from the skate park they often

bail on a jump and damage the smooth surface. The skatepark riders were welcomed but did not understand how to fix the damage they caused. Other individuals that were not the right "trail candidate" were deliberately disrespectful or destructive. Brent also noted how challenging it is to find the right people to help, "A main struggle with a lot of places is having the people to help and dedication. It's like that diamond in the rough. We're all searching for it." Ultimately what happens if the builders cannot recruit enough participants is that "people get burned out and spots get somewhat of abandoned"—Jared.

The consequences of failed tension management

Failure to negotiate these tensions can lead to a number of negative outcomes. For example, participants recalled stories of the "Red Box" jump site. The Red Box jumps were initially built illegally next to some railroad tracks in the south end of the city. After city workers discovered the jumps, police officers arrested some of the diggers, and the city brought in bulldozers to level the jump site. Participants at Red Box and members of the community alike saw this as an overreaction. Hogan recalled:

> It was actually in the news, [name] and everyone else got arrested for digging and it was then the rest of the community found out and they just laughed like, "Are you kidding me? You're arresting a kid for digging fucking dirt jumps."

Some members of the community considered the Red Box jump site as both a positive outlet for youth, and a means for displacing other undesirable groups, such as drug users or homeless camps. In response to the backlash, the city attempted to work with the builders to recreate what was bulldozed. Mark recalled:

> Red Box was a real interesting experiment because you had half the people in Appleton that were like, "Fuck that. That's the city's attempt to recreate what they destroyed because they got egg on their face and they looked bad. It's never gonna work, no one's ever gonna dig there"… Well, it's still there and people still dig there, but there's no structure at all there, so you really get more of that rogue guy showing up digging and changing everything… that was a very interesting

> experiment in like, "Okay, they tore down organic trails and they tried to replace it with structured trails, and you get what you get when you do that."

As Mark mentions, builders were hesitant to contribute to the Red Box site because of its more official and inorganic nature. Regulations from the city also restricted precisely *where* the jumps could be built, which limited the variety of jumps that would fit in the space. Hogan stated:

> There was only one line you know?...You could only session that for how many minutes and get bored? I always wanted to do stuff to the right, down in the trees, because there was essentially if you went past that little chill spot, it went downhill.

He clarified that "one of the stipulations [from the city] was you couldn't touch the trees" meaning all of the jumps had to be built in a straight line in a mostly flat open clearing. The restriction to building on the open space meant the jumps could not be as varied with switchbacks, transfers, berms, and larger sizes. The city provided dirt for the jumps so that the riders would not dig large holes, however, regulations were also placed on the type of dirt that could be used. Manuel recalled working with the city to get the dirt:

> They even let us go to this quarry and choose dirt. The dirt, they said, 'we had this chosen for you,' we said, 'we want *that*,' they said, 'this is what we had chosen for you,' it wasn't a choice… what a big choice.

Manuel indicated his sarcasm around the "choice" the city gave the riders by picking out the dirt for the group. The dirt chosen for the riders, along with the limited location the riders were allowed to build on, caused problems in the future. Manuel added, "The vibe is you're out in this open field; it almost feels like you're breaking rocks on a chain gang." Consequently, the community of diggers ultimately did not emerge to support the space (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: The Red Box Dirt Jumps

The jumps are located in an open cleared field and are subject to heat and sun for several hours of the day. To the right of the jumps in the thicket of trees is a natural downhill slope that riders wanted to build on, but city restrictions kept the jumps in the cleared area. Summing up, Hogan stated:

> Using that clay or that dirt, the sun bakes it, it cracks super easy. You got to pull water from the creek, which you gotta go walking down essentially two stories of a hill to lug water back up. So, that was a pain in the ass. There's a ton of reasons why that really didn't take off, you know?

As this case shows, the tension of organic/civic was poorly managed—leading to the eventual disuse of the site. Of course, the eventual stagnation of the site cannot be blamed solely on city efforts or organic efforts. Material features of the space, combined with regulations over how the space could be developed, such as the water source of a creek

being located too far from the jumps down a steep embankment, and the jumps location in an open field susceptible to Texas sunshine, also played a role in the downfall. In explaining why the Red Box jumps did not thrive, Griff compared the spot to other successful jump locations:

> Apple Creek has the creek, it typically has water in it. And at 18th Street you've got the water hose, so both of those two things differentiate like these jumps in the scene, over some other trails that just don't make it. I think they've lasted because of access to water.

As these quotations illustrate, the success of failure of an organic dirt jump location cannot be attributed solely to mismanaged organic/civic tensions—material features of the environment also play a role. How then might communication help to balance these tensions and prevent the degradation of the jump site? In the next section I detail the communicative practices that manage these tensions and ultimately sustain the site.

Communicative Practices to Manage Tension

I view the communicative practices as unfolding within a space of practice (Leonardi, 2015) that encompasses intertwined performative, social, and material practices (see Illustration 5.1). The participants in this space have to strike a communicative balancing act that allows for increased participation, but also curbs unwanted behavior. They must balance a perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the city, without conceding to becoming too formal and losing their rogue DIY ethos. The diggers must include multiple voices and opinions in building processes, but not so many that it becomes impossible to achieve a collective outcome. The double sided arrows between each set of practices is meant to imply that these are mutually entangled practices and not separate. For example, the act of *work signaling* with material artifacts is at once bound up with the social and

performative categories. The categorization of three dominant practice groupings serves as a presentation tool for the findings.

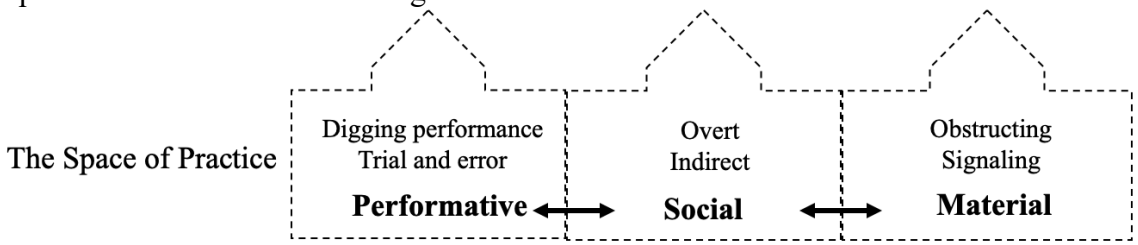

Illustration 5.1: The Space of Practice

Material Practices

Participants engage in *work signaling* and *material obstructing*. One of the threats to sustainment is that the city will either takeover or destroy the jump site. In order to make sure the city knows that the space is still in use and has not been abandoned, members are careful to make sure that the place looks active. Penn stated:

> 18th Street is kind of an eyesore. If you look across the street and see this nice green grass and the trees and stuff over there, yeah, it's pretty. And then you look across the street and you just see all of these dirty, shirtless, tattooed dudes riding little kids' bikes.

In order to present a better image to "outsiders" participants of the collective configure materials in the space in such a way as to signal the worth or value of the space. On two separate occasions I helped participants to plant shrubbery near the jumps and spread fresh mulch around the base of trees. Nora stated, "We wanna make sure that the trash is picked up, the place is looking nice and not like it's been abandoned." The participants used these forms of beautification as a material signal to the city reaffirming that the space has value for the community.

Material signaling also helps to balance the contributing/loafing tension. By placing full buckets of water next to the jumps, and in some cases, full sprinkler pails of water on

top of the jump lips (see Figure 5.2), it sends a message to riders that they need to water the jump faces before riding. In many instances the buckets and sprinkler pails physically obstruct the path to riding. Shovels are often left leaning against trees near the jumps, brooms are typically within close reach. While observing on April 16th 2017 I witnessed Manuel get into an argument with individuals who were trying to ride scooters on the pump track. The scooters did not have enough ground clearance to make it over the rollers without gouging and scraping off the top of the dirt roller. After the scooters refused to leave, Manuel used the garden hose to liberally soak the pump track so that the scooters physically could not ride on the surface. That is, *material obstructing* was used to prevent unwanted loafing behaviors.

Figure 5.2: Material obstruction practice that balances contributing/loafing

Social Practices

The challenge of encouraging people to contribute while discouraging social loafing is managed through overt and indirect communicative practice. Overt practices of telling people what to do were rare, but not nonexistent. Given the nature of this public, volunteer-built space, individuals did not often directly confront someone and give them orders so to speak. Penn clarified, "We won't be generally – I can speak for myself – dicks about it and be like, 'Oh, you're fucking it up.' We'll just be like, 'Just do this. Here, I'll get that for you if you want to do this instead.'" Indirect communicative practices include subtle conversational hints about how to contribute to the space, or preventing someone from damaging the jumps. For example, I arrived at18th street to start an observation session and found a builder had just resurfaced one of the jump lines. As I walked over to the jump site while pushing my bicycle the builder was on his way out of the park. He did not know me, but I had seen him around the park a few times. On his way out, he stopped briefly to tell me about a technique for lightly "spritzing" the jump faces with water. This talk about technique for how to water the jumps was a way to indirectly suggest that I contribute to the space, without having to come out and "give an order" so to speak. In other observation sessions, I witnessed a builder approach someone riding the track while it was dry. Instead of outright telling the rider to contribute (i.e., water) he asked questions about the moisture content of the dirt, and if he knew when the last time the course was watered.

Performative Practices

A key challenge faced by participants lies balancing the tension between inclusion and consensus. Because everyone cannot be involved in the decisions, and the fact that including everyone in those decisions would lead to conflict, the tension is resolved

through a performance of *trial and error* building. In discussing the challenges of gaining consensus, Jared stated;

> We would definitely take the overall opinion of what people wanted, but we didn't really put more value on one individual opinion and we didn't ask everyone either . . . You can't really ask everybody. Everybody's got different opinions. Everybody's got what they think should be done, but at the end of the day, it's kind of who's maintaining it? Who's taking care of it? Who's there every day?

In other words, Jared made attempts to ask around of what they should build, but also recognized 1) the difficulty of doing that, and 2) that actually achieving that goal would elicit many differing opinions. Balancing this tension happens through a performance in the space. Rather than trying to gain consensus, one, two, or a small crew of people will build something and then test to see if the wider community likes it. As Hogan explained "People will just mainly notice if it works or not and then they'll be like, 'You dug this, right?' Then you'd be like alright, well they're not questionable about digging." Penn explained, "There is no – nobody's voting for you. People just know that – you know you can dig. People know you can dig. And, if you're around enough, it's like you're part of the scene." Manuel also reflected on the nature of evaluating what to build:

> If you see a worker out here and they're working on something, if it makes sense, or if it doesn't make sense, I would expect somebody to say "what are you doing, this isn't making sense. Did you talk to anybody about this?" "No, I didn't, but it's gonna be cool." We'll say, "I guess so; we'll try it if you're working."

In other words, although the individual creating a feature did not take a group consensus over the construction of that feature, the wider community can ride the feature and evaluate for themselves whether or not the addition is valued.

Digging and *riding performances* help to balance the organic/civic and contributing/loafing tension. As Penn noted, "Without people riding down there, the city's

going to notice that and just plow and put grass on there and let dogs run there or play frisbee golf." In some of my earliest observations at 18th Street in 2015, I jotted down a statement one of the builders said while working on a jump at the front of the park: 'We want it to look busy when the cops drive by.' This participant recognizes that the police represent an appendage of the local government, and want the space to look occupied and not abandoned. By being physically present and active in the space it reaffirms the value to the city. Through my observations, I also noticed that some individuals are very visible with how they work. Often times wheelbarrows are moved, shovels are gathered, and watering is "performed" in full view of others who may be socially loafing and not contributing. This *digging performance* serves as a signal to others of how to act in the collective.

Summary of Practices

An excerpt from my field notes recorded at 18th Street on May 14th 2017 may help to clarify these practices:

I messaged Gary [all names pseudonyms] through Instagram to let him know I was coming to 18th Street for his interview. When I arrived, a guy in a bandana (~early 20s) that I did not recognize was riding the main line and it looked dry. Ivan also came by as I was talking with Gary. I began spraying some of the lines with water, and Ivan and his friend walked over to help. Gary showed up and gathered together a broom and flat shovel, carrying them over to the 5th jump on main line. While I was getting out my recorder, he wrangled the garden hose across the main line jumps and snaked it over to where we were setup. As the bandana rider passed by, Gary directly told him to "pick up a shovel if you're going to ride." The bandana kid seemed a little intimidated and asked Gary how he got the jump landers so smooth. Gary replied with something generic about having to keep working at it. The bandana guy was a decent rider and hit right line once or twice more until Gary soaked the jumps with water from the garden hose—making them too wet to ride. Another kid (~mid-teens) walked up and asked what he could do to help. Gary said, "see all the leaves on left slacker? Make them not there," while pointing at a rake leaned against a nearby tree. The kid moseyed around near us for a while but did not grab the broom and eventually walked off to ride his bike.

This 40-minute episode of interaction illustrates several practices that occurred through the interplay of language, performance, and materials. For example, the action of lines 5-6 where Gary gathers tools, are not only to help accomplish the work of maintaining the jumps, they are also performative in that they were conducted in full-view of other riders. Having the shovels and brooms in close proximity is a *material signal* to the other riders that 'work' is about to occur. In this particular example, the materiality of the garden hose artifact was used in a novel fashion (line 7, coded as 'material obstructing'). By routing the garden hose across one of the jump paths, Gary ensured that the bandana rider would notice that 'work' was about to happen as his tires hit the bump of a garden hose in an otherwise smooth track. The communicative acts in lines 8-9, as well as 14-15, are more straightforward and require less analysis. These phrases were coded as 'issuing directive.' When the 'bandana rider' does not help, we again see Gary use the material affordance of the garden hose (line 12-13) to prevent further riding.

From this brief episode of interaction, we can see how the communicative practices are comprised of language, materials, and actions. Taking a process view, the mundane micro practices coded as 'tool gathering' and 'material obstruction' are grouped into the larger thematic category of 'work signaling'—non-verbal behaviors indicating that the jumps need maintenance.

Communicative Practice Sustainment Model

In the final stage of analysis, I returned to the data with a focus on finding connections between communicative practices and organizing tensions. I reviewed the codes that generated the communicative practice themes of digging performance, riding performance, overt and indirect social practices, work signaling, and material obstructing and went back to the data to see the context around these codes. This step allowed for me

to trace when and why a particular practice may have been deployed. For example, particular data segments forming the contributing/loafing tension were often accompanied by actions coded as material signaling and indirect social practices. Repeating this process allowed for connecting the social, material, and performative practices with the overall tensions that they help to balance. The model derived from the findings includes three main areas. At the bottom of the model, Illustration 5.2, *The Space of Practice,* is combined with the realm of tensions. Successfully balancing those tensions reinforces an overall characterization of the space as being *materially flexible* and *vision flexible*.

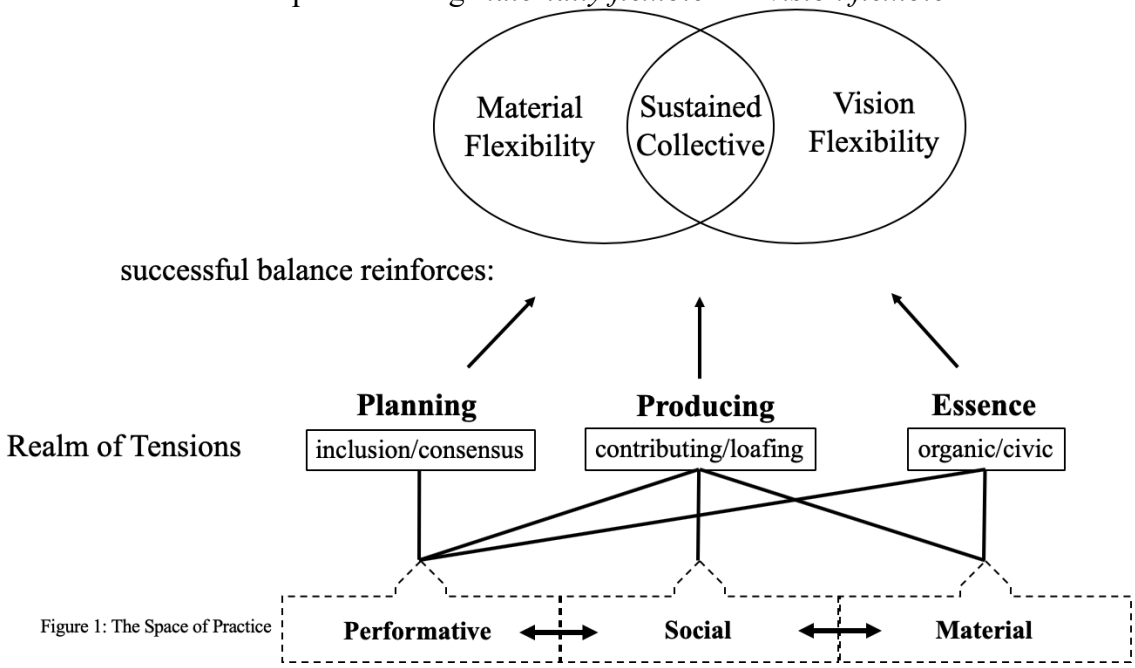

Illustration 5.2: Communicative Practice Sustainment Model

This theoretical model proposes that intertwined social, material, and performative practices help to balance the tensions of planning, producing, and essence. More specifically, solid lines in the model indicate particular communicative practices that help to manage that tension. For instance, *hinting*, and *directing* are social practices (although always intertwined with the body and materials) that balance the tension between

contributing and social loafing. Overall, these communicative practices sustain a very particular characteristic of the space that I detail in the next section.

Vision and Material Flexibility

When these tensions are balanced, it supports a recursive interplay between vision and material flexibility. I use the term vision flexibility to mean an open recognition that multiple ideas of what this space *is* allows for the inclusion and productive engagement of many individuals. What allows for vision flexibility to be carried out is the material flexibility of the space. The dirt jumps are comprised primarily of soil that can be moved, reconfigured, and reshaped as the riders' desire. Contrast a set of flexible dirt jumps with that of a concrete skatepark. Participants at a concrete skate park, or even a children's playground, cannot reconfigure the materiality of the space and the vision for what that playground and skatepark *is* is largely fixed by design (see Table 5.2 for example quotes).

The consequences of material and vision flexibility are threefold: 1) the space can adapt to a wide range of talents, 2) the space can evolve to keep the jumps exciting, 3) the space allows for embracing multiple ideas. All of these elements sustain the community of builders and riders. Reflecting on one of his favorite dirt jump locations in Appleton, Jared recalled:

> It was really cool because it was a place that was limitless in some ways. Even if you were no good, you could cruise around and have fun. If you were a top pro, they had stuff that would really push your limits.

Jared's quote shows how the material flexibility of the space made it exciting and capable of catering to the skill level of many individuals. Gary seemed to recognize that 18th Street needed to accommodate a range of talents, stating, "if some little kid rolls over a tiny bump, don't ever tear that bump out – make it bigger so that kid can get better, and better, and better." Similarly, Hogan commented on the importance of the space as accommodating

many, “especially with the pump track now, it being like this magnet for youth, these young kids, and [name] and I, and [name], kind of having that pride and ownership of the next generation riding.” Ultimately, I argue that the recursive interplay between vision and material flexibility allows for the park’s survival by sustaining the community of users. If people do not show up to dig or ride then the park will fall into disuse, disrepair, and possibly be reclaimed by the city. Accommodating the younger generation helps to renew the user base and ensure the park is around for years to come. As the younger riders progress, the material flexibility of the space allows them to implement their visions and rework the jumps to keep things exciting and matching their evolving skill level. In starting his own dirt jump spot, Carl recognized that the flexibility of the space was important for sustaining the collective:

> I’m trying to create a DJ scene, I wanted to have a place that would’ve – pretty much anybody can come riding, and rotate, and that’s still to me, keeping the scene going had a lot to do with appealing to riders that weren’t the best riders.

It was important for Carl that many individuals could enjoy the space. While organizational research orthodoxy may suggest stability and order as tantamount for organizing, findings of this research suggest that there are clear social and practical benefits to fluid organizational forms.

Theme	Example Quote
Vision & Material Flexibility	Half the people are like, "Man, that thing is awesome," and then everyone else is like, "You're gonna get the trails plowed. You're a dick. You're gonna get this place shut down," and I was like, "Man, whatever. I'll tear it down." And then the wall ride went up and people started shredding that thing, so it was [inaudible] [00:06:59] to a dirt wall ride a little bit kicked back. And when people started shredding it, the guys that were hating on it were like, "Oh, okay."
	We'll give you a chance on that thing, and I'll see how it goes. I don't think that's fun, that doesn't make my level of riding go up, that doesn't challenge me. That doesn't make my head want to come over here and ride it.
	There's always a beginner level of people; people are always progressing. It's cool as people progress, so do the jumps. Different things get built, it's always cool. It's changed so much.

Table 5.2: Vision and Material Flexibility Example Quotes

Discussion of Communicative Practice

Leonardi (2015) encouraged a focus on why certain practices develop. The inductive model presented here explains why social, performative, and material practices emerge in this fluid collective. First, the setting lacks organizational structure that could otherwise balance those tensions. The lack of structure and rules in itself is the genesis of the tensions. Contrary to the more established forms of organizing that many practice-based studies have centered on, there are no "ostensive" (Pentland & Feldman, 2005) aspects of routines in this loosely structured environment. The ostensive artifacts, or "physical traces of an organizational routine" (Pentland & Feldman, 2005, p. 805), such as rules, standard operating procedures, checklists, and forms are absent from this organizing context. Additionally, this context lacks the practices considered as "genres of organizational communication" (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994) in that there are no memos, meetings, expense forms or training seminars that carry social expectations. The park is in an open

public environment that is not managed by official agencies or codified rules. There is no employer employee contract that ties individuals to particular duties. Everyone is participating on a volunteer basis in a public park.

The fluid nature of this space helps to explain why the indirect social practices are often utilized. When no one is officially "in charge," and individuals are volunteering their time, it is important suggestions to contribute do not come across as "giving orders" or with a tone of admonishment. Indirect practices such as hinting, suggesting, or disguising conversations balance the contributing/loafing tension without angering or ostracizing volunteers. These particular practices are successful for their ability to adapt to these threats, and walk a fine line between being rigid enough to accomplish "work" without scaring away newcomers and flexible enough to adapt to contingencies in the environment.

This study has shown how practices are a combination of performance, materiality, and sociality in adapting to threats from both insiders and outsiders. This particular research shares with previous other studies a focus on "boring things" (Star, 1999), such as electronic records, and other mundane objects. However, the mundane and boring of this study are shovels, rakes, rocks, benches, and other seemingly inconsequential forms of matter. This research joins a growing body of scholarship in empirically demonstrating the constitutive and performative capabilities of these objects. The model inducted from the findings presents an explanatory framework of the types of material, social, and bodily entanglements with practice that sustain fluid organizing amid myriad tensions.

The materials of this context are also not simply matter—they are communicational. The values and uses of many of the technology materials (e.g. shovels, rakes, garden hose) are not fixed properties. As in the example of Gary dragging the hose across the track, we see an unconventional use of the materiality of the hose as a resource. The shovels propped against trees and scattered near an ongoing jump site are valued not

only for their ability to dig and transport soil, the technologies communicate and make some actions possible and suggest constraints on other actions.

Practice is often defined as "goal directed" (Leonardi, 2015) activity. This study departs from prior research and shows that practices are more theoretically complex in terms of goals. Participants spoke mostly of personal goals rather than shared goals, and sometimes decried the fact there was little shared vision in the space. The study adds more theoretical richness to Leonardi's (2015) dictum that practice is "goal directed." Individuals take actions, without a clear cut goal in mind, that sustain the organization. The nexus of these disparate, not necessarily goal oriented actions, sustains the organization despite any clear intention, cognizance, direction, or hopes from the participant. The combination of human action, sociality, and material agency intermingle to form greater outcomes in the world. This finding echoes previous studies, such as Wilhoit and Kisselburgh (2015), in showing that disparate unintentional contributions—from both humans and nonhumans—can form recognizable forms of organizing.

In terms of tensions, this study differs slightly from prior research in showing how tensions are not generated by official organizational directives, work roles, meetings, policies, procedures, etc., but the tensions emerge organically through interaction. The source of many tensions in prior research often concerns the nature of employee feelings and employer demands. For instance, in Tracy's (2004) study of correctional officers, tensions emerged from contradictory occupational roles. Notions of membership, hierarchy, and work roles that are part and parcel of conventional organizing are often entangled with the tensions. Instead, this collective's interactions produced a form of organic tension that is bottom up, developed in communication and interaction by the people.

As scholars have noted, “while participation is clearly part of inclusion, the connection is not entirely straightforward” (Feldman & Quick, 2009). Confirming Feldman and Quick’s observation, this study demonstrates that participation is not a monolithic construct. The space must embrace participation, or “work practices,” in varied forms. Ultimately, what the jump park *is*, is instantiated in practice by the participants.

And lastly, one should keep in mind that negotiating these tensions through communicative practice is an ongoing accomplishment that requires continuous work. By continually striving to negotiate these tensions, participants of these loosely structured groups can ensure the survival of the public good. It is not simply that a dirt jump park is sustained through communicative practice, but a very specific formulation of the space. It reinforces a cultural milieu that is characterized by both vision and material flexibility. Future studies should seek out public officials to investigate their perspective on collaborating with these forms of social collectives.

Chapter 6: Discussion

SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION FINDINGS

This dissertation sought to understand how individuals collectively accomplish the construction and maintenance of a shared public good. The findings show how authority functions within this collective, how the pure natural and (re)natural material environment influences the collective's ability to organize, and explains how the tensions inherent to this fluid organizational collective are balanced through particular performative, social, and material practices.

Summary of Chapter 3: Authority In Loosely Structured Collectives

Chapter 3 explains how repetitive stories and assertives, in the form of work analogies and social media hashtags, scale up through time and space to form the authoritative text of no dig, no ride. The use of the dry guy nickname is circulated both in person and through online memes to setup an abstract 'heel' character that members of the collective recognize as breaching social etiquette. The threat of earning this heel character nickname disciplines members to accept the no dig, no ride authoritative text. The findings demonstrate that the authoritative text of no dig, no ride upholds a group ethos that values contribution to the collective, yet this text is both paradoxical and ambiguous. Despite the text claiming no dig, no ride, participants do not actually want anyone or everyone digging at the jumps. The authoritative text is also ambiguous in that it encourages contribution, but does not specify precisely how to carry out that contribution. The ultimate effect of this ambiguous paradoxical text is that it perpetuates conflict within the space. Participants who want to contribute, but lack the skills or knowledge for how to contribute, often destroy or alter features within the space.

Summary of Chapter 4: Tracing Organizationality Through Materiality

The first contribution of Chapter 4 lies in developing the *pure natural*, and *(re)natural* as a way of conceptualizing materiality as occupying space along a spectrum and always in relationship with humans and the social. Where a "thing" lies along the spectrum depends upon degree of alteration at human hands. At the far left end of the spectrum, the *pure natural* constitutes perceptible non-sentient things and forces such as sky, wind, rain, trees, foliage, soil, sunlight, temperature, weather events—aspects of the world outside the bounds of sentience and human creation. At the right end of the spectrum is what one would commonly understand as material 'things.' Once the pure natural is transformed, or altered into an *irreversible* new state to achieve new outcomes, it ceases to be pure and is either *(re)natural* or material. (Re)natural things are typically forms of the pure natural that are sculpted, or moved in a way that fulfills human needs and desires (e.g., sand castle, dirt jump, living snow fence).

The chapter then discusses how the pure natural and (re)natural contributes to this fluid collective's ability to achieve organizationality through interconnecting seemingly disparate decisions, prompting and regulating actions, and contributing to organizational identity. This chapter contributes to organizational theory by further theorizing the natural material environment as a participant in communicating and constituting organizationality.

Summary of Chapter 5: Communicative Practices

Chapter 5 explored the organizing tensions inherent to this fluid setting. This context lacks the structure and rules that are often used to overcome tensions, but also can become sources of tension in and of themselves. As a result of the fluidity of this collective, the tensions of organic/civic, inclusion/consensus, and contributing/loafing characterize the collective. The chapter details the consequences of failing to manage those tensions, by

explaining the destruction, reinstatement, and eventual stagnation of the Red Box dirt jumps. The findings are then used to form a space of practice that entails the social, performative, and material intertwined practices that help to balance those tensions. The data form an inductive model that shows how those practices balance the tensions and ultimately support a version of the collective that is both materially and vision flexible. The material flexibility of the space allows for the jumps to be continually reconfigured to accommodate differing ideas and opinions, differing skillsets, and to keep the space challenging and exciting.

Theoretical Contributions

Taken together, the findings of the three chapters extend our understanding of three conceptual areas of scholarly interest: authority, materiality, and tensions in organizing. First, this dissertation has explained how authority forms and disciplines in fluid social collectives. The findings fit within a Montréal understanding of authority as distributed and negotiated as opposed to being tied to organizational structure. Beyond a broad understanding that 'conversation' scales up into an authoritative text, this dissertation theorizes how *specific* communicative elements form authority that transcends a singular site, and operates across multiple fluid contexts of organizing. Findings reveal authority as emerging through the communicative elements of repetitive stories and assertives. Authority, as traditionally understood, is an element of coordination, control, and channeling behaviors. The authoritative text detailed in this study serves as both a source of recursive conflict and a resource for ongoing organizing. That is, the authoritative text theorized in this dissertation is not only an element that leads to stability in organizing—it also plays a role in perpetuating the equivocality of the collective's day-to-day existence. This chapter also revealed that social media represents an arena wherein individuals can

vie for influence over the trajectory and formation of an authoritative text. Since this fluid setting lacks organizational boundaries, more individuals are capable of resisting or enacting the authoritative text's meaning through online communication. Scholars should continue to explore the nexus of social media discourse and authoritative text formation. Interesting questions from this domain lie in unraveling which communicative tactics are successful vs. unsuccessful at rewriting an authoritative text.

Theoretical contributions to materiality research can be found primarily in both Chapters 4 and 5. This dissertation provides a new conceptual tool for understanding the agency of nature without resulting to human or nonhuman dualisms. The environmental agency chapter and the communicative practice chapter add to the canon of research that considers all forms of materiality as agential and intertwined with the social. The inert matter of rocks, dirt, shovels, and rakes, as well as human bodies are theorized as part of the "plenum of agencies" (Cooren, 2006) that exist in the world. Environmental agency is understood as consequential in prompting and regulating organizing actions—primarily in contributing to achieving actorhood, interconnected decisions, and identity—all aspects of organizationality. Conceptualizing the pure natural and (re)natural also advances materiality studies by moving away from designed and crafted forms of materiality. In many cases, the term materiality is often equated with technologies or human-created artifacts that are, by design, intended to facilitate communication (i.e., software, memos, architecture, signs). Both the pure natural and (re)natural are theorized on a continuum from pure to human altered, allowing for greater consideration of their agential effects. This conceptualization will allow scholars to more precisely theorize how the social intersects with the material.

Finally, this dissertation adds to tension and disorder literature by empirically demonstrating how tensions emerge, and are communicatively negotiated, in fluid social

collectives. The findings on materiality and communicative practice also build theory in the area of non-intentional or non-goal-directed actions. Work practices are generally understood as undertaken for a specific greater purpose. This dissertation revealed how individualized practices can be enacted without clear organizational directive or purpose, and still have significant consequences for the survival of the collective. Similarly, Chapter 4 and 5 revealed that many of the day-to-day actions of simply being visible in the space, without any clear intention of communicating a particular message, are assuring the organizationality of the collective and negotiating the tensions inherent to fluid collective organizing. Whereas prior tension centered scholarship has investigated how tensions emerge from conflicting organizational mandates, this dissertation shows how tensions emerge in fluid settings.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Gathering The Official Viewpoint

The largest absence of this research is that it tells a one sided story from the point of view of the BMX participants themselves. This research provided a strong account of how the participants who actually construct and maintain the space communicate to achieve collective outcomes, but these participants are embedded in a much larger network of relationships with other organizations that could be further explored. Participants of this study were wary of too much civic involvement, as evidenced by the organic/civic tension developed in Chapter five, and slightly critical of the city's past attempt to partner with the organic group to create a public dirt jump location. Admittedly, my recounting of the Red Box dirt jump case (as revealed through the participants of this study's interviews) may come across as critical. Therefore, it should be noted that interviewing only the BMX participants in this study did not gather the city's viewpoint as to how those interactions

unfolded. It is likely that the city had their own set of restrictions and limitations that made engaging with the organic group challenging. Although I was unable to include the findings in this dissertation, a recurring theme I found throughout this data was that some BMX dirt jump locations remain hidden in an attempt to fly below the radar of civic groups and even other BMX riders. This need for hiding their location, both physically and socially, is likely born out of a fear of overpopulation of the jumps and concern that local governments could plow the jumps if discovered. Future studies could explore the challenges faced by city recreation employees when attempting to collaborate with organic and fluid community volunteer groups.

Among the landscape of other organizations that surround the BMX dirt jump collective, attention should be paid to local businesses that support the sport of BMX and community of riders. Many participants of this dissertation mentioned the importance of a local BMX shop and mail order parts company that used to be located near the 18th Street Dirt Jumps. The shop has supported the growth of both the community of riders and the dirt jumps themselves over the years, despite moving a little further away from the 18th Street location. Similarly, two other BMX frame companies are located in Appleton. These companies often provide free product during events. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, the larger community of organizations, such as businesses that support the sport and community, could be studied to determine what effects these organizations have on the survival or stagnation of an organic action sports community.

Other Fluid Settings

This dissertation reveals that valuable knowledge can be gleaned from investigating other sites of fluid organic organizing. Organizational scholars are well-positioned to investigate the increasing fluidity with which we relate to one another, a common

characteristic of boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994), gig economies (Manyika et al., 2016), and post-bureaucratic organizing (Barker, 2014). We should continue to question how this underlying fluidity intersects with many spheres of life. For instance, the area of disaster response and preparedness would be well-served to understand the fluidity of organizing, particularly in relation to how these fluid collectives can relate to more conventional organizations. During the flooding of Hurricane Harvey in Houston TX, impromptu citizen groups rapidly formed to begin conducting water-based rescues and establish supply drives. Outdoor enthusiasts used their own personal watercraft to conduct house-to-house rescues in the floodwaters. Other citizens leveraged social media to coordinate and direct those rescues, as well as share information and provide advice (Smith, Stephens, Robertson, Li, & Murthy, 2018). In other natural disasters, emergent digital volunteers, or "crisis mappers" (Brandusescu, Sieber, & Jochems, 2016) use social media to document oil spills (McCormick, 2012), pinpoint shelters on a map (Palen & Hughes, 2018), or map damage during an earthquake (Liu & Palen, 2010). Understanding how these emergent and organic citizen-led groups interact with conventional organizations is a worthy pursuit given the life-saving capabilities of these collectives.

Scholars should also continue investigating when informality, fluidity, and organic forms of organizing are deployed instead of conventional organizing, and what the consequences of this organizing are for the community. Although some of these contexts may more closely resemble conventional organizations than the fluid collective this dissertation is based on, informal community groups, neighborhood watches, and even pickup basketball leagues likely exhibit characteristics of fluidity worthy of further examination. Questions moving forward could center on understanding the strengths and limitations of fluidity, and why more fluid forms emerge instead of conventional formations.

The organic and fluid nature of social challenges perpetuated through social media represent an area for further exploration. For example, the hashtag of #trashtag began trending across the Internet in early 2019. The viral challenge includes taking a photo of a polluted urban or natural area, cleaning up and bagging the trash, and then taking an after photo. Participants of the challenge then post a side-by-side before and after photo to social media with the #trashtag hashtag. These sorts of pro-social viral challenges are not the end product of formalized and conventional organizations. Rather, the collective power of separate individual actions are held together into a collective movement through communication.

Although not as direct of an outcome as a public recreation space, clean urban areas, or rescues during disaster, scholars should continue theorizing how minor individualized actions—typically conducted outside of conventional organizing and without greater collective intentions—have aggregate effects. The Pont Des Arts bridge in Paris, France recently experienced the aggregate effects of individual actions. For years couples attached 'love locks' inscribed with their names onto the fence of the bridge as a symbol of their commitment. The bridge became a staple stop on many tourists' trips through Paris. Similar bridges emerged in cities across Europe and the United States. These smaller actions gave rise to a cultural phenomenon and a tourist ecosystem centered around an otherwise uninteresting bridge. The weight of hundreds of thousands of locks on the Pont Des Arts bridge eventually caused a section of the fence to collapse, prompting Paris officials to remove the remaining fence and locks. What this example shows is the aggregate effects of many individual actions. These small fleeting actions eventually caused the destruction of a portion of the bridge and prompted a conventional organizational response. Similarly, desire paths emerge when individuals depart from a concrete sidewalk and take a shortcut through the grass. If only a few individuals shortcut across the grass it may not kill the

grass. A desire path forms when many individuals repeatedly take the shortcut. Both the love locks bridge and desire paths illustrate what ecologists have termed the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin, 1968) wherein individuals act in their own self-interest and deplete or spoil a common shared resource. Future research should explore how smaller fluid actions can have positive collective outcomes instead of perpetuating the tragedy of the commons.

The Power of Fluid Organizing

Just as this dissertation revealed the power of fluid collective organizing for constructing and maintaining a public recreation space, the examples of fluid organizing contexts presented above hint at the power of these collectives in other spheres of life. Although powerful, these fluid forms of organizing have not, historically, been the central purview of organizational scholars. In both the #trashtag viral challenge and disaster response examples, fluid collectives tackle pressing problems that official governmental organizations struggle to resolve. For instance, the polluting of natural and urban areas happens on such a large scale that conventional organizations dedicated to cleaning up trash likely do not have the financial resources to service such large areas. Widespread natural disasters, such as flooding, wildfires, and earthquakes, can overwhelm official emergency response organizations and compromise their ability to provide aid or conduct rescues for every individual in need. In addition to being stretched thin by a high volume of 9-1-1 calls, official responders' equipment and headquarters can be rendered inoperable by wildfire or floodwaters. In both disaster and pollution examples, fluid collectives are powerful organizational actors in that they are providing a public service that complements the efforts of conventional organizations.

The Natural Environment

This dissertation theorized the natural environment as an important, but often overlooked, contributor and regulator of organizational processes. Findings revealed how the fluidity of the collective mirrored the fluid and unpredictable nature of the natural environment. The weather and soil temperatures dictated when the jumps could be constructed and maintained. The unpredictability of the weather and environmental conditions meant that formalized approaches to organizing were not as effective as the fluid and ad-hoc forms of participation for accomplishing the collective outcome. Beyond recreation environments, an interesting area for future research lies in untangling how nature impacts and regulates the actions of collectives. In thinking about the overlooked impacts of nature, it becomes more apparent how frequently the weather and seasonal changes regulate action and have broader social and economic consequences.

Much of the conventional organizing in civil society is conducted in direct response to environmental issues. For instance, cities dedicate ample time and resources to controlling and routing flood waters. Homes and structures are designed with consideration for views of nature (a social value), as well as for their ability to harness solar energy passively through seasonal solar paths, or actively through solar panels (economic values). Choices of building material are often tied to the microclimate of particular regions. The field of "biomimicry" research (Benyus, 1997) seeks to emulate nature in design. For example, biomimicry researchers have examined the beak of a woodpecker to develop new shock absorbing applications, and the designer of the Eastgate Center, a shopping complex in the Zimbabwe desert, mimicked the architecture and ventilation processes found in termite mounds to construct the center without central air conditioning—thus saving on construction expense and energy consumption (Fehrenbacher, 2012). It is clear that the natural environment plays a role in nearly every aspect of life. Society has realized the

importance of nature in design and construction; however, greater consideration could be paid to the predictable and unpredictable elements of nature vis-à-vis how we collectively organize.

Practical Implications For Recreation Managers.

In placing the findings of this dissertation into a broader context, it is helpful to look at similar cases of fluid, and sometimes not so fluid, volunteer organizing in the United States. At the outset of this dissertation I detailed the potential consequences of poorly constructed or poorly managed public recreation spaces. Aside from creating simply unappealing, or at the worst un-rideable/un-skateable parks, efforts that focus exclusively on concrete parks in the hopes of satisfying the entirety of the action sports community are a bit naïve. Although, as noted in chapter one, excellent examples of public dirt parks exist, and pump tracks are beginning to spring up in greater numbers across the United States, the full embracing of user-built BMX dirt jumps has yet to occur, and the particulars of how to work alongside these organic collectives is still unclear.

The Dilemma of Organic Versus Managed Volunteering

Attempts to cultivate organic user-built recreation spaces are dilemmatic. Individuals are reluctant to work with local governments for fear of complicated bureaucracy, excessive regulation, or the possibility of losing the cool, DIY, rogue ethos of the space, yet this partnership is often necessary for their survival. Although this dissertation contributes primarily to theoretical knowledge of organizing, I think that the findings from Chapter 5 shine the brightest line on how city recreation managers and other officials might support these types of public spaces. As participants of this study revealed

in the findings of Chapter 5, the Red Box dirt jumps illustrate the challenges of attempting to work with fluid volunteer groups. The Red Box dirt jumps were built illegally next to a set of train tracks in South Appleton. Once the city discovered the trails, a few diggers were arrested, and the trails were plowed.

Similar scenes of longstanding dirt jump locations being plowed have played out across the United States. In many locations, jumps are constructed on power or water line easements, flood plains, and otherwise unused areas. Once discovered, the precarious location of the jumps, and the dangerous nature of the activity, often puts the builders into a tenuous relationship with city officials. A case of user built public mountain bike trails in in Houston, TX illustrates one city's reaction to the amenity. For instance, Houston, TX citizens built a sprawling network of mountain bike trails along the flood plain of a meandering urban bayou. Spurred to action by the flooding of Hurricane Harvey in 2017, the local flood control district announced plans to remove trees, vegetation, and ultimately the mountain bike trails in the interest of creating concrete flood mitigation. According to the Harris County Flood Control District website, the mountain bike trails "were built on publicly-owned land without written permission and without compensation to the public" (Harris County, 2019). The flood district states that, although they recognize the value of these amenities, the property is ultimately designated for flood control. Writing for the *Houston Press*, Jeff Balke opines on the city's reaction, stating:

> For cyclists and people who enjoyed the park, those trails constructed "without written permission" were some of the best examples of quality hiking and biking trails the city has to offer. The very fact that they had to be crafted by park visitors instead of the city makes the very idea that the city should have been compensated for the "construction" particularly idiotic. (Balke, 2019)

My intention in including this example situation is not heavy handed criticism of the government's reaction—the consequences of failing to control floodwaters are certainly

greater than the need for a public mountain bike trail. Rather, I believe this case reveals an appreciative public sentiment over the value of user-built recreation outlets. Balke (2019) even claims that the user built trails are the "best examples" of public hiking and biking trails within Houston and it is preposterous to think that the builders and users of this publicly shared amenity should pay the city for use of the floodplain. In all, I think that this circumstance illustrates that user-built public recreation spaces are largely appreciated by the public and city officials should continue attempts to embrace this form of volunteering. However, this partnership is much easier stated than actually accomplished.

Other than needing to convert the land to flood mitigation, government agencies often seek to avoid the liability of such a high-risk recreation space and will plow the spot to avoid potential lawsuits. In rare instances, such as the Sheep Hills Trails in California and even the primary field site of this study, the city allows the jumps to remain (Sablan, 2010). In other incidents, the builders are forced to change the features (usually making them smaller), or move to a new location. For example, the Riverdale BMX jumps in Riverdale, Utah were described by a city councilman as containing "high risk death jumps" (Winterton, 2015, para. 3). Rather than completely destroying the jumps, the city converted the space into a smaller bicycle pump track safe for BMX, mountain, and strider push bikes. The most common outcome befalling illegally built dirt jump locations is that the jumps are simply plowed for development. For instance, despite a long history within the BMX world, the "Post Office" jumps in Aptos, California (Clark, 2014) and "Palm Trails" in Riverside, California (Stark, 2017) were both plowed for encroaching development.

Although Appleton city officials initially plowed the Red Box jumps, they should be commended for attempting to work with the diggers to recreate the jumps, however, as findings around the tensions of fluid collective organizing reveal, it is not a straightforward task. Participants of this study highlighted the tensions between an organic, bottom up,

form of public recreation space, and a top down, city funded and built recreation space. Participants of this collective want the *feel* of the park to be an organic, rogue, DIY venture. For instance, Griff commented on come of the standout examples of public dirt jumps, claiming:

> It's [18th street] different because it's maintained by the people…now Valmont and Frisco, they're really clean parks, so I guess, I don't know how to put this, because they are very clean and they're very well maintained… but it's not in the woods, man.

Griff felt that there was something special about dirt jump locations that are sheltered by trees. Similarly, Mark commented, "being in the woods, you know, if you go to Red Box and there's just a bunch of jumps in a field, it's boring, dude. It's way better to jump through a tunnel of vegetation that creates a way cooler feeling." Carl noted that when cities attempt to construct dirt jumps, they often pick wide open fields so that heavy equipment can be brought in for construction. He noted:

> That's a couple hundred grand to design a bike park, then building…Is it actually a great idea to have a spot in a big open field? Not really, most people want to hang out under trees, it blocks the wind and the sun, there's just something about riding through trees and under trees, and around trees and stuff.

Carl started his own dirt jump site without help from the city. Reflecting on the dirt jumps he started, he reminisced, "frankly I think what I did was better than some cities and what they spend their money on."

The city of Appleton could help to manage 18th Street, yet even with minimal city involvement individuals felt that the site might lose some of its organic nature. As explained in the case of Red Box, the city attempted to work with the BMX builders to recreate the plowed jump space, but *how* that partnership unfolded held consequences for the ultimate survival of the jumps. For instance, the city regulated the specific type of dirt that could be used, as well as precisely where the jumps could be constructed. Riders

wanted to build closer to the trees and take advantage of a downslope in the land. Ultimately, the jumps had to be constructed on a flat and open plateau susceptible to near constant sunlight and far from a water source. Material features of the space, disinterest of the riding community, and regulations over the construction of the jumps all played a role in the stagnation of the space.

The Green River Bike Park in Wyoming is a standout example of the tension between organic and civic managed approaches to recreation. Rather than a bottom up set of BMX dirt jumps that emerged organically from a group of BMX riders, local community leaders, members of the recreation department, and a local mountain bike advocacy organization partnered to create a public community bike park supported through both corporate sponsorships and volunteer contributions. Creating the park was an involved process of initial site assessments, feasibility studies, community outreach, stakeholder meetings, grading the land, training volunteers, etc. The efforts of all the individuals involved in the project are quite commendable. The community was able to take a vacant piece of land and develop it into a public recreational amenity that caters to multiple riders. However, this particular bike park stands in stark opposition to the field sites of this study—particularly in how that process unfolds.

For example, volunteers seeking to contribute to the park must consult the Volunteer Builder Manual (www.greenriverbikepark.com/builders.html), a seven page pdf manual of build session checklists, waivers, registration and build report forms, volunteer safety talk and equipment checklists, volunteer tool and equipment checklists, and volunteer test riding protocols (see Appendix C for sample pages). A selection from the Volunteer Registration and Build Report Form reads:

> All volunteers must register and sign in/out for each build session. Volunteers must have a signed Volunteer Waiver/Emergency Contact Form on file.

> Volunteers must wear safety vests at all times during work sessions and are encouraged to wear sturdy clothing and boots in addition to protective equipment including: gloves, eye protection, ear protection, etc.

Although extensive, these bureaucratic forms have a purpose. The city likely needs to have such waivers and documentation in order to maintain insurance liability. Checkout lists for tools would likely help prevent tools from going missing—a common problem at the field site of this study. I visited this field site during the summer of 2018 but was disappointed to find a facility that had fallen into disrepair (see Figure 6.1-6.2).

Figure 6.1: Conditions of Green River Bike Park Roll-In in July 2018

Figure 6.2: Conditions of Green River Bike Park Soil and Jump in July 2018

For instance, Figure 6.1 shows a wooden roll-in to a line of dirt jumps that is missing a plank, making accessing the rest of the line challenging. The soil conditions of deep sand, as well as the washout and weeds growing in the pit of a jump in Figure 6.2 made successfully riding the lines very challenging. Almost all of the lips of the dirt jumps were cracked and crumbling and not in a 'blue groove' condition. Other features requiring less maintenance, such as the 'North Shore' skinny ladders were in great shape and fun to ride. Whether the park was never maintained beyond initial construction or I simply happened to visit the site at a time when it had been neglected is unknown. What is clear, however, is that the park needs the support of a core group of participants if it wishes to thrive at the level of other organic dirt jump spots. One should also keep in mind that soil

conditions of Wyoming, climate, and (lack of) rainfall likely played a hand in the condition of the park on the date I visited. Although my analysis of the Green River Bike Park may come across as overly critical, any attempts at increasing public recreation opportunities should be encouraged—even if they do not lead to an optimal dirt jump course.

The lesson to be learned from this illustration is that challenges will emerge when governments attempt to either recreate, or create from the ground up, public recreation spots. As participants of this study stated, they do not necessarily want the city to come in and impose bureaucratic regulations similar to those found in the Volunteer Builder Manual of Green River Bike Park. Most of the contributions to 18th Street happen on an ad hoc basis. A participant might stop by for 30 minutes after work to water the course or "butter" a jump lip. This type of at-will sporadic participation is what allows the park to survive. Attempting to impose checklists, safety briefings, and timekeeping records of hours spent volunteering would likely be a futile effort at 18th Street.

In reviewing my field notes, there were a few days where the 18th Street BMX nonprofit wing promoted a "day of volunteering" that lined up with the local parks foundation's city wide day of volunteering. The 18th Street nonprofit encouraged participants to register for the event through the park foundation's website, a process that required filling out an online form and waiver. Despite heavily promoting the volunteer day, few BMX riders showed up to the event. In talking with, Mark, the coordinator for the 18th Street nonprofit, he stated that the foundation wanted him to read a safety checklist to volunteers that included reminders to 'hydrate every 15 minutes' and explained proper 'rake safety.' During this informal ethnographic interview, I was unable to digitally audio record his statements at the time, but I found his comments so insightful that I paused moving wheelbarrows of mulch to record a field note in my smartphone. Based on those notes, Mark claimed, 'these guys aren't going to register to dig out here, it doesn't work

like that, I don't think they [the parks foundation] understand we're out here jumping 15 feet in the air without helmets, they're not going to listen if I try to do that.' I think the sentiment Mark was trying to convey was that 18th Street is characterized by this form of sporadic and ad hoc fluid participation. Attempting to have volunteers complete checklists, wear high visibility vests, gloves, eye protection, and other clothing would likely not succeed in this organic context. The challenge moving forward will be to balance regulatory restraints and bureaucratic requirements with the wants, desires, and fickle nature of the BMX dirt jump community. When attempting to harness the potential of user built recreation, care should be taken to empower rather than manage volunteers.

Perhaps the clearest practical suggestion offered by this dissertation is the idea of both vision flexibility and material flexibility. As the findings of Chapter 5 offered, vision flexibility is a recognition that multiple ideas of what this space *is* allow for the inclusion and productive engagement of many individuals. Vision flexibility is made possible through material flexibility. Dirt jumps are comprised primarily of soil that can reconfigured and reshaped into new jumps as the riders' desire. While concrete skateparks, children's jungle gyms, and concrete pump tracks are great recreational amenities within a community, they are mostly fixed in form. Once a public good has been designed and constructed it is more or less fixed, yet I have found examples throughout this research of individuals attempting to exert creativity against a fixed environment. For example, Figure 6.3 is of a user built wooden ramp that was added to the local skatepark—even color painted to match the gray concrete. The ramp added new ways to traverse between the skatepark stair section and the upper bowl section. Figure 6.4 shows a user built metal rail added to the bank of the skatepark.

Figure 6.3: User built wooden addition to concrete skatepark

Figure 6.4: User built addition to skatepark

Although anecdotal, these small additions to designed parks exemplify individuals' desires to be creative and exert ownership of their recreation spaces. At the outset of this dissertation I provided examples of poorly constructed public skateparks. To be clear, the park where these two DIY additions were created are already well designed and constructed—users simply added features to their liking.

What both of these examples show is that, given a proper outlet, some individuals want to contribute to their recreation spaces even beyond being consulted during the design phase. If city recreation managers can embrace the recursive interplay between vision and material flexibility when considering public recreation options, then efforts at supporting

user built recreation are more likely to survive. This interplay between material and vision flexibility sustains a community of users. If people do not show up to participate in the collective endeavor, then the park will fall into disuse, disrepair, and possibly become a waste of valuable land resources.

Material flexibility also allows for accommodating younger riders as their skillset evolves. As the riders progress, the material flexibility of the recreation space allows them to reconfigure the jumps to match, or slightly increase their skill level. The constant refiguring of the jumps also helps to keep the space exciting. Although the Green River Bike Park case noted earlier was in a state of disrepair during my visit, the park had enough space to successfully accommodate riders of varied skill levels and disciplines. It was clear that the designers had given great thought to the layout of the park and how riders of all ages might utilize the park, unfortunately the majority of the park was not maintained. Taken together, material and vision flexibility serves to support the existing user base of an organic space, and pull in younger participants, thus helping to insure the space's survival.

Interestingly, the findings of Chapter 5 on vision and material flexibility could potentially help offset the challenges surfaced in earlier chapters. For example, Chapter 3 detailed how the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of the authoritative text no dig, no ride perpetuates conflict within the space. Participants, feeling the obligation to contribute but lacking the competency (in skillset or knowledge) of how to contribute, often end up altering, tweaking, or even destroying a jump—despite right-minded intentions. The consequences of this insufficient authoritative text are likely even more pronounced for newcomers. These conflicts could have the negative effect of excluding newcomers or frustrating committed participants. In order for the dirt jumps to stand the test of time the space needs a committed collective of participants to maintain and build the site. If dirt

jump locations can remain materially and vision flexible it will allow for incorporating newcomers and giving others a space to construct *their* visions of what the jumps should be. For example, Martin stressed the necessity of properly envisioned and crafted jumps and the learning process needed to develop those jumps :

> Some people are really good at that [building jumps], and others aren't so good. It may take them a few jumps to realize – and mistakes – to realize, "Oh man, I shouldn't have done it like that." Because, the way the trails are now, they flow all together, so if you build one jump in the middle that's too abrupt, or you lose your speed, or something, it'll affect the rest of the line. So, yeah, it's hard to do. I think it's just experience, though. The younger diggers that are there, they're gonna mess things up; but, they're gonna, also, learn through those mistakes. So, I think there's a lot of tolerance given to that.

If a dirt jump space is completely rigid, not allowing room for experimentation and mistakes to be made (i.e., not materially or vision flexible), it will be harder for the newcomer to acquire the skillset needed to maintain the spot.

LIMITATIONS

One should bear in mind the situated and context specific nature of this research. Given my sustained engagement across multiple field sites, I am confident that the findings could be generalized to the larger BMX dirt jump community in the Southern United States, possibly even at an international level for some of the findings. Indeed, across my summer travels to dirt jump locations (including BMX dirt jumps on the West Coast of the United States, Canada, and the Czech Republic) I encountered similar social settings that upheld the paradoxical authoritative text ethos of no dig, no ride. However, other findings may not generalize as well to the broader BMX dirt jump community. For example, a key finding of Chapter Five was developing the organic/civic tension inherent to the dirt jump locations. While the dirt jumps communities examined in this study maintain tenuous relationships with local governments, BMX communities in other states may have better

relationships, or even more complicated histories, with civic administrations. State regulations and laws likely also play an influence on the relationship between these fluid groups and civic organizations. Participants often commented that the Southern state that this research was conducted in has a laissez-faire, at your own risk attitude toward risky public recreation, whereas other States are more hesitant to embrace risky recreation that could lead to lawsuits. One should also note that the findings are specific to the BMX dirt jump community and may not transfer as well to other action sports communities.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Given the progress made by the nonprofit behind 18th Street BMX, I would not be surprised if the space becomes more and more formalized as the years progress. Drawing from institutional theory, the nonprofit could face coercive and mimetic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) causing the collective to emulate other public recreation spaces in order to be perceived as more "legitimate" (Suchman, 1995) in the eyes of the city. As I finish up the writing portion of this dissertation, the nonprofit leader is submitting a grant proposal to the city. If the grant is funded, and I certainly hope it will be, the site will likely see an increase in formalized material elements that complicate the findings presented here. For example, two participants of this study mentioned that grant funding could pay for a large sign at the entrance of the park that lists the history of the park, rules, and guidelines for contributing. If these signs are installed, it would complicate my arguments around the pure natural, (re)natural, and other forms of materiality's ability to provide a social address to the collective. Similarly, a sign designating rules for participation through digging may disrupt, or negate the utility of, authoritative texts.

One overall finding that struck me was how often individuals evaluated the fun of a recreation space based on the "vibe" or social scene that emerged around the sport. The

"best" recreation spots were not always defined solely by how fun or how large the jumps are. Rather, individuals were quick to reference the community of builders and riders as impactful of the value of the spot. For example, Carl reflected on the heyday of a spot he founded: "It was the most fun ever, actually it was the best time I had biking, and most biking friends I've had in any given time, and for a while, my riding was the best that it was. Ever." As a communication scholar, I hope that the findings of this dissertation help city and recreation officials to see the value of these spaces, and embrace the equivocality surrounding their day-to-day operations. I will end on a quote that I think neatly sums up of these types of recreation outlets. Jared reflected on a dirt jump spot that he helped to create, but was ultimately destroyed by the city:

> That spot was great because so many different people could come, people who had never ridden a bike can go ride and have fun. People who are experienced can have fun. So, you've got moms. You've got dads. You've got kids. You got racers, street riders, trail ladies. You've got world known pros. You've got nobodies out there and they're all just having a great time.

The key, not only to a strong theoretical understanding of collective action but also to the creation, support, or destruction of these spaces, is the same: a thorough understanding of communication in all its forms.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: KEY TERMINOLOGY

Term	Definition
Backside	The back part of a dirt jump, opposite of where a rider's tires contact.
Berm	A banked turn that allows the rider to maintain higher speeds through a corner.
Blue Groove	A very smooth and bump free jump surface that forms with the right moisture content and after multiple rider's tires have packed the jump surface. The surface of the jump is not a groove, but appears bluish in color.
Buttered	A very smooth and bump free jump surface.
Case	To unsuccessfully clear a jump and land with the crank of the bicycle, or the rear tire, slamming into the edge of the landing.
Chill Spot	The informal hangout spots near the BMX jumps. Often a shady spot with seats hand built from fallen logs, tree stumps, or rocks.
Dialed	The state of a set of dirt jumps being in good condition.
DIY	Do it yourself.
DJ	Dirt jump.
Double (jump)	A jump with a gap between the takeoff and lander requiring the rider to successfully clear over the jump. Also known as "gap jump."
Flow	The jumps "flow" properly when the spacing and steepness of the jumps allows the rider to carry momentum with little pedaling between jumps.
Gap	A jump with a gap between the takeoff and landing ramp.
Hip	A jump where that takeoff and lander are placed at opposite angles, typically requiring the rider to shift position.
Line	A set of jumps. One dirt jump spot can have multiple "lines," some even allowing transfers between them.
Lip	The smooth part of the takeoff ramp of a jump.
Pit	The bowl shaped pit between two jumps.
Pump Track	A small circuit of berms and rollers that a rider can navigate continuously, without pedaling, by using a pumping motion of the legs and upper body to generate momentum.

Quarter Pipe	A curved jump wall wide enough, and steep enough, for a rider to take off and land on the same jump.
Roll-In	The first access point for a line of dirt jumps. Often in the form of a dirt downslope, or in some cases, a wooden ramp or drop off.
Running	The state of all the jumps on a line being in good, rideable condition.
Session	To ride for an extended period of time.
Set	A pair of takeoff and lander ramps within a line of jumps. Example: The third set on the right line.
Stacking	Piling fresh dirt into the shape of a jump.
Table Top	A jump with a flat surface between the takeoff and lander.
Transfer	A jump that changes the rider's trajectory in midair.

APPENDIX B: PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

- How long have you been cycling?
- How often per week do you ride at X?
- How experienced do you feel as this type of cyclist?

Biking in youth

- Did you do any type of riding as a child or when you were younger?
- Did you build your own places to ride?
- Did you visit public parks or skateparks?
- Did you use protective gear as a child?
  Why or why not?

Activity

- What is it you enjoy about your sport?
- Do you currently wear any protective gear?
  Why or why not?
- Have you been injured in this sport?

Locations

- Where do you ride mostly?
- Do you build jumps/features at this spot?
- If yes, how do you decide what to build?
- Who are the jumps built for?
- Do you know the history of the spot?
- How did you find this spot?
- Who is in charge at your ride spot?
- How does a hypothetical newcomer fit in at this spot?
- Is the city or county involved out here at all?
- If yes, which parks?
- If so, how do you choose what trails you are going to ride?
- Do you know about the trails before you get to the bike park?

Groups

- Is there a defined group of people at this riding spot?
- Are you part of this group?
- What binds this group together?
- How do you contact this group?
- Does this group have any goals?
- What is a typical “good day” at this trail spot consist of?

General Conclusion

- Describe your most memorable experience at (x) or with biking.
- What makes this experience memorable?
- Is there anyone in this scene that is influential that I should also speak with?
- Is there anything I have not asked that you think is important to know?

Green River Bike Park

Volunteer Build Session Checklist

___**Volunteer Build Session Information:**
(email build session information to wbratton@cityofgreenriver.org and [redacted]@cityofgreenriver.org at least 48 hours in advance of build session to obtain approval for session)

Date:_____ Start Time:_____ End Time:_____

Estimated Number of Volunteers:_____Construction:____ Maintenance:____

___**Volunteer Registration Box:**

Registration box should include a folder for blank forms, a folder for completed waiver forms, a clipboard, pens, first aid kit and safety equipment.

___ **Volunteer Waiver / Emergency Contact Form:** (1 per volunteer)

Volunteers must fill out all safety and emergency contact information on waiver form and completed forms should be kept in a folder in the registration box.

___ **Volunteer Registration Form:** (1 per 10 volunteers)

Volunteers must sign in and sign out on the registration form in order to ensure safety equipment, and tool return and to accurately record volunteer hours.

___ **Volunteer Safety Talk and Equipment Checklist Form:** (1 per session)

The safety talk informs volunteers of building protocol, responsibilities, and rules. The equipment checklist helps organize safety equipment and ensure enough equipment is available for volunteers at each session.

___ **Volunteer Tool and Equipment Checklist Form:** (1 per session)

Volunteer tool and equipment checklist helps organize and keep track of volunteer equipment to ensure proper storage and site safety at all times.

___ **Volunteer Build Report:** (1 per session)

For each build session the completed Registration Form with hours totals should be filled out and submitted to the Green River Parks Department.
(email completed build report to [redacted]@cityofgreenriver.org and [redacted]@cityofgreenriver.org.)

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